
MAJOR BIBLE PROPHECIES

37 CRUCIAL
PROPHECIES THAT
AFFECT YOU TODAY

JOHN F.
WALVOORD

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Major Bible Prophecies: 37 Crucial Prophecies that Affect You Today
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Preface

The twentieth century has been an unprecedented period of change. At no time in history have more changes occurred in science and in the political structure of the world. More changes occur in science in a single year than formerly occurred in a century.

The events of the twentieth century have done much to change human life. Two world wars have torn our world. The advent of atomic weapons and missile warfare has shrunk its size and put it in jeopardy of another world war.

Events of the twentieth century have alerted Bible students to the tremendous potential for fulfilled prophecy. With Israel restored as a nation in 1948, the panorama of end-time prophecy came into a focus in which Israel will be a prominent player.

The introduction of the concept of a world government, made real by the United Nations, also paints a scenario that is in harmony with prophecy concerning a future world government.

Recent events in Europe have highlighted rapid political change and introduced the possibility of democracy becoming a major factor in the political scene. Though this is not a special subject of prophecy, it is entirely possible that people will

discover that democracy does not have the answer to our world's problems and may succumb to dictatorship, exactly as the Bible predicts for the end of the age.

In this whole context, the rapture of the church looms as an imminent event that will occur before many of these end-time events are fulfilled. Accordingly, the study of prophecy in its present fulfillment not only becomes important to theology as a whole in clarifying eschatology and Bible interpretation in its entirety; it also has a very practical relation to Christian hope and expectation. There has never been more reason than there is now for the church to expect the imminent return of Christ.

In light of these tremendous events and the clarification of so many details of eschatology in the twentieth century, a study of major Bible prophecies as they relate to human destiny holds great significance. I hope that this book will alert students of Scripture to the importance of prophetic study in the days in which we are living and to the hope of the Lord's imminent return.

I deeply appreciate the excellent stenographic services of Karen Grassmick, who has done much to present the material in this book in effective form.

The study of prophecy in this volume has been based on the New International Version unless otherwise specified.

John F. Walvoord

1

The Prophetic Chart of Human Destiny

The Questioning Mind

Children are full of questions. They want to know about everything that forms a part of their world. They ask questions about how a thing works or why it does what it does. Such activity is the secret of their rapidly expanding knowledge. As they grow older, they begin to ask more sophisticated questions about the meaning of life. Who is God? Why is a certain action wrong? Why do people die? What happens after a person dies? Humans have questioning minds.

Humans, created in the image and likeness of God, even though crippled by sin, have a natural tendency to seek an explanation of the world that lies about them. The early revelation given to Adam and Eve seems soon to have been lost by subsequent generations. Generally speaking, humankind seems to have assumed that there must be a God, One who is greater than humanity. But what kind of God is he? The concept of a God of love and grace who is infinitely good seems to have

escaped early humans, and worship often descended to a fearful search of means to appease gods who were superior to humans but just as wicked.

What is the meaning of life? Why do humans exist? What is really important in life? Is there a system of values? What is right and wrong? As history began to unfold, questions arose concerning life's meaning and the destiny of humanity. What does the future hold? Again, there seems to have been an almost uniform recognition of the afterlife. But what did this life consist of? Often the pursuit of answers to questions was hindered by the more immediate challenge of making a living, attaining success and power, and achieving human goals. Too often human sin intervened and rendered useless the search for truth.

The Search for Answers

Humankind continues to have questions that require answers. Since the advent of the potential for nuclear war, people have been jolted into considering ultimate questions of the future. What kind of a world are we living in? Does life have any meaning? What is really worthwhile in life?

For many, the blight of materialism has eliminated the search for ultimate answers, but the perennial questions still arise. What kind of God do we have? What is our future? What happens when we die? Is it possible that we may be nearing the end of life as we know it?

Prior to the writing of Scripture God revealed himself to certain individuals. Adam and Eve had an introductory revelation of who God is and of his purposes for humankind. Noah, through his experience in the Flood, had a graphic illustration of the sovereignty of God as he works in human affairs. God is able to create, and God is able to destroy. God is able to raise up, and God is able to put down. God is worthy of worship and obedience.

In Abraham's time God gave far-reaching prophecies concerning Abraham's personal role in the future and said that he would be the father of many nations. Through Abraham would come One who would bring blessing to the entire world. Also revealed to Abraham was the particular plan of God for the people of Israel who descended from him; much of the book of Genesis relates to Abraham and his descendants Isaac and Jacob. As these important revelations of God were later incorpo-

rated in Scripture, they constitute the background of the prophetic chart of human destiny.

The Old Testament Prophetic Chart of Human Destiny

The revelation of God to Adam and Eve. The Old Testament reveals a prophetic chart of the future of the human race. This began with the revelation that God gave Adam and Eve. In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve were able to confer with God directly. They understood that he had created the world, that he was sovereign, and that they were responsible to him. They were given answers to some of life's most persistent questions.

When sin entered the human race through Adam and Eve, fellowship with God was partially broken. They were now sinners relating to a holy God. To Adam and Eve, nevertheless, God revealed his great purpose of salvation through One who would come from a woman (Gen. 3:15). This anticipated the virgin birth of Christ. Also apparently revealed to Adam and Eve was the principle of blood sacrifice as a means of atoning for sin. Adam and Eve knew God as a gracious and loving God but also as a God of righteousness and judgment. Unfortunately, the revelation given to Adam and Eve was not passed on to many who descended from them.

The revelation of God to Noah. By the time Noah and his family came on the scene, the human race had largely departed from God to the point where God himself said that Noah and his family were the only ones worthy of deliverance from judgment. When the Flood came as a tremendous demonstration of the sovereign power of God, Noah saw the world of his day wiped out and the task of beginning anew committed to him and his three sons. Noah had a clear revelation that God works in the world and is involved in history through his providence.

The revelation of God to Abraham. God made an important announcement about the future to Abraham. To him was made known the special purpose of God in calling out a people to be the express channel of his revelation. To Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were committed the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, including the promise of a great nation and the promise that through them would come One who would be a blessing to the whole world. This obviously—from the Christian perspective—referred to Jesus Christ. From Genesis to Revelation the special purposes of God, such as his plan for the people of Israel and his

plan for the Gentile world, follow their dual track. The ultimate fulfillment will not come until the end of the age.

The revelation of God to Moses. Moses, the first writer of Scripture, wrote the first five books of the Old Testament. Moses was sovereignly chosen by God to be the lawgiver. With the help of his thorough education in the palace and schools of Egypt and his discipline in forty years of shepherding in the wilderness, Moses was prepared by God to set forth the great truths of the first five books of the Old Testament. To him was given the commission of gathering the history of the race from Adam to his time. In Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, Moses passed on to the children of Israel the revelation of God concerning the Law for Israel in its many details, its promises of mercy, and its threats of judgment. The entire Bible to some extent rests on the principles God gave Moses, even though their primary application was to the people of Israel.

The revelation of God to David. To David, king of Israel, God gave a special revelation concerning the future of his kingdom. David's throne and political power were to go on forever, though interrupted for long periods of time. The ultimate fulfillment of this, as in the case of the Abrahamic promise, was the coming of Jesus Christ. The revelation given to David, however, concerned Jesus' second coming rather than his first. The promises given to David were amplified extensively throughout the Old Testament in many chapters and pronouncements on the coming kingdom of God from heaven. Understanding these prophecies has become very important in helping us comprehend Christ's teachings and the significance of his second coming as well as answering questions about the future of Israel.

The revelation of God to Daniel. When Daniel lived as a prophet in Babylon from 605 B.C. to about 530 B.C., God gave him a series of prophecies that outline the future of the Gentile world as well as the future of Israel. Daniel was given the dual revelation of God's program for Israel, culminating in Christ's second coming, and God's program for the Gentile empires of the world, likewise culminating in Christ's second coming. This was a more far-reaching description of the future than that given by other prophets. Daniel came on the scene after two great empires, Egypt and Assyria, had come and gone. Through the prophet Daniel, God revealed that there would be four addi-

tional great empires—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The scope of the prophecies reaches all the way to Christ's second coming. They give no details of the present age between Pentecost and the rapture. Rather they tell of the seven years preceding the Second Coming and describe the finale for Gentile power in world government. These prophecies are very important in understanding God's plans for the future.

The program Daniel was given for Israel paralleled God's program for the Gentiles, but, according to Daniel's revelation, it would begin with the time of Nehemiah when Jerusalem was to be rebuilt. Israel's program was to continue throughout the Old Testament to the time of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Then the prophecy, like the prophecy for the Gentiles, skips the present age and resumes its revelation in the last seven years leading up to the Second Coming. In God's two-track program for the Gentiles and Israel, he revealed his sovereignty; his solemn purpose; his plan to use the Gentile empires to display his power and sovereignty; and his concern for Israel, which was manifested in his faithfulness, grace, and righteousness. Added to Daniel's revelation, the major and minor prophets join their voices in tracing God's plan and purpose for the Gentiles, including his ultimate judgment upon them and his plan and purpose for Israel, including her ultimate restoration at the Second Coming. To understand the program of God for the future, one must study Daniel. Only the Bible gives this information. No other religion provides such a significant schedule of prophecy to be fulfilled as well as prophecies already fulfilled. Anyone who wants to know the future of our world must study these prophecies.

The New Testament Prophetic Chart of Human Destiny

Revelation through Jesus Christ. The New Testament adds many additional prophecies to Old Testament revelation. In the New Testament Jesus Christ is introduced as the One who fulfilled many prophecies himself and also taught much about the future. John 1:17 succinctly states, "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Christian faith begins with the truth of grace provided in salvation. The first coming of Christ was preeminently a revelation of the grace of God. Though salvation was clearly taught in the Old Testament, it is questionable whether Old

Testament believers understood that the Messiah, when he came, would die on a cross and be himself the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is a revelation which the disciples were at first unwilling to accept, for it was contrary to their concept of Christ as the glorious King.

The grace of God was manifested in many ways in Jesus Christ's life on earth. Jesus' mercy, as revealed in the many miracles he performed, was a demonstration of the grace of God. His teaching of the necessity of forgiveness was in keeping with this revelation. The supreme revelation, of course, came when Christ died on the cross for our sins and rose again. Difficult as it was for the disciples to understand at the time, it was to be the cornerstone of their message as they went out preaching the Gospel. The world was to hear that there was a Savior. God himself, who had sent his only Son to die on behalf of sinful humans, manifested his love and grace by making salvation possible for those who did not deserve it.

The coming of Christ was also a revelation of divine truth. Jesus was the greatest of the prophets, and his teaching ministry is recorded in the four Gospels. It could well be cataloged as a systematic theology. He taught that Scripture was inspired by God. He revealed the various attributes of God, including his grace, love, mercy, goodness, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus had much to say about angels and their power and limitations. He frequently spoke about the sin of the human race and its desperate need of God. Especially in the Gospel of John he unfolded the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ. Though most of his message revolved around the kingdom he would bring in his second coming, he also introduced the subject of the church, and especially in John 13–17 he outlined the major prophecies that would be fulfilled in the present age in God's dealings with Jew and Gentile in Christ. In answering the disciples' questions concerning the end of the age, Jesus outlined the major events leading up to the Second Coming in Matthew 24–25. He described his glorious second coming from heaven to earth and the judgments that would follow. He anticipated also the millennial kingdom and assured his disciples that they would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The revelation given through Jesus Christ, as extensive as it is detailed, affords a view of the present and the future that no other prophet could provide.

The Acts of the Apostles. In the book of Acts the experiences of the early church are recorded in detail. Most important to observe is the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, baptizing believers into one body and in this way forming the church, God's special purpose in the special age. Jew and Gentile were to be united and the partition between them broken down. The book of Acts also reveals that in the present age the primary power of God is going to be revealed through the Holy Spirit.

The theology of the New Testament. In addition to the truth revealed in the Gospels and Acts, the Epistles unfold the wonderful truths that are the heart of our Christian faith. The basic theology of the New Testament was the revelation given through Paul in his various epistles. The expansive nature of this revelation is seen in the fact that it touches almost every area of theology. Paul had much to say about the Bible itself, the doctrine of God, including the doctrine of the Trinity, especially focusing on the Person and work of Christ. He also referred to the nature of angels and humans. He provided the basis for understanding salvation by grace. He disclosed the distinctive character of the church and finally spoke of Christ's second coming. Other books of the New Testament not written by Paul likewise added their contribution in these various fields.

The climactic disclosure of the book of Revelation. The last book of the New Testament, Revelation, reaches its climax in its portrayal of Jesus Christ in glory, his second coming, his reign on earth, and the supremacy of the new heaven and new earth.

Also imparted in the book of Revelation is Christ's last word to seven churches in Asia, local churches chosen as representatives of churches throughout the church age. To each of them Christ directed a practical word of exhortation, praise, and revelation.

Most of the book of Revelation, however, concerns the detailed prophecy of the period leading up to the second coming of Christ—more specifically, the Great Tribulation. Here is the climax of ordinary human history—God's judgment upon Gentile power and upon sin, and God's fulfillment of his purpose in bringing Israel to her point of restoration following Christ's second coming. This period of great suffering will follow the rapture of the church.

The New Testament does not dwell on the doctrine of the Millennium, though one chapter is devoted to it (Rev. 20). The Millennium is the theme of so many Old Testament prophecies

that this truth did not need to be repeated. The climactic chapters, Revelation 21–22, however, draw aside the veil of eternity and reveal the new heaven, new earth, and New Jerusalem, as the final chapter of the prophetic chart of human destiny.

Though philosophers and scientists in various fields have attempted to understand and chart the human race, no book ever written has been a prophetic chart of human destiny like the Bible. It explains the nature of God and his purposes, his working among the nations of the world, his special plan for Israel, and his special plan for the church as well as the Consummation. In these God demonstrates his sovereignty and his righteous judgment as well as his marvelous grace in the salvation of those who inherit the new earth and New Jerusalem. A study of this prophetic chart brings awe and wonder to believers as they contemplate the immensity and detail of God's plan and purpose in his sovereign outworking in the human race to the present hour and on to its consummation. The examination of this chart furthers the hope of believers in the future, as well as their confidence in the God of grace who can meet humans in their present situations. Though understanding all the details of prophecy may be difficult, the most important truths stand out. Jesus came the first time to save us from our sins by dying on the cross. He will come at the rapture to take his own to heaven. In his second coming he will bring justice and deliverance to the earth. Ultimately the wonderful truth of our eternal home in the New Jerusalem brings God's work of salvation to its completion. Prophecy, the fear of the wicked, is the bright hope of the children of God.

2

The First Prophecy: Sin and Death

"And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die'" (Gen. 2:16–17). Though it is hard to realize today, the world, when created, was without sin.

Sin and death are faced by every individual as well as by every religion. Understanding God and salvation requires an understanding of what sin is. The Christian faith stands in contrast to other religions. Pagan religions have gods, but they are as sinful as humans. Accordingly, pagans fear their gods because they are wicked and vengeful. The question of holiness is never considered. Pagans, accordingly, try to devise ways to appease their angry deities and often resort to human sacrifice.

What a contrast is found in the God of the Bible! He is holy, loving, gracious, and just. God judges sin, but he also provides a gracious escape from judgment in salvation in Christ. Though death comes as a result of sin, resurrection is promised, and the future of those who trust in Jesus Christ is glorious.

Accordingly, when one studies what the Bible reveals about sin and death, what is revealed should be contrasted to the beliefs of the pagan world and their deities.

The Primeval World (Gen. 1:1-2:25)

The created world without sin. As created by God, the world of Adam and Eve was free from the laws of sin and death. In every respect the environment was flawless, illustrating the perfection of God's handiwork. There was nothing in the environment to create a problem for either Adam or Eve.

As created by God, Adam and Eve had no sin nature. They were created "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27). It was natural that they would desire food and drink and that they would have a sense of beauty and a sense of self-worth as persons created by God. But there was no inclination toward evil and no temptation within or without.

Satan, the source of evil. The only problem in the newly created world was the existence of Satan, who appeared to Eve in the form of a serpent (Gen. 3:1). The Scripture here presents no explanation of the origin of an evil created being. Later scriptural revelation would account for Satan as one originally created as a holy angel who fell from his holy estate into sin long before the events of the created world as described in Genesis. Prophecies directed at Babylon and the King of Tyre go far beyond their sins to that of Satan in the prehistoric world (Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-19). These passages have been so interpreted since the early church fathers. The world as created by God had no evil; the serpent possessed by Satan was the only source of evil. The resulting record of the temptation and fall into sin of Adam and Eve account for the whole philosophic and theological problem of sin and evil in a world that God had created good.

God originally planted two unusual trees in the Garden of Eden, "the tree of life" and "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:9). No explanation is given of the special character of these two trees, but the clear implication is that partaking of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil would permit the one partaking of it to know good and evil while the one partaking of the Tree of Life would partake of eternal life.

God had issued a sweeping warning to Adam and Eve that

partaking of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil would result in their certain death (Gen. 2:17). Significantly, nothing is said about their partaking of the Tree of Life. The implication is that if they had obeyed God in regard to the forbidden fruit, they might have eaten of the Tree of Life and lived forever. As subsequent events unfolded, however, this was not to be realized by Adam and Eve.

Satan's Method: Questioning the Word of God

The question of how sin entered the human race is explained in these early chapters of Genesis. Satan tempted Adam and Eve to sin by partaking of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Basically, Satan's method in all temptation is to question the Word of God.

Satan's first question. Satan asked, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1). This age-long question of Satan concerning whether God has given clear revelation is the cornerstone of his entire method. Ignoring the rich provision of God in creation for Adam and Eve, Satan selected only the fact that they were not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Misquotation of the Word of God. Satan's misquoting what God had said characteristically stresses the negatives but not the positives of obedience to God. Adam and Eve were free to eat of any tree in the garden except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 2:16). No mention is made of the fact that God had said, "You will surely die" (v. 17). Satan's partial quotation of what God had said was a deliberate misrepresentation of the total revelation of God. All temptation begins by questioning a clear revelation of Scripture.

The Woman's Flawed Comprehension of What God Had Said

Misunderstanding the extent of God's blessings. Satan realized that Eve only partially understood what God had said, for she disparaged the wonderful freedom she and Adam had of partaking of the entire garden except for the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In so doing, she overemphasized the prohibition and underemphasized the privileges.

Adding severity to God's command. In repeating the prohibi-

tion Eve added to the severity of the prohibition statement, "You must not touch it" (Gen. 3:3). Though it probably was best not to touch the fruit, God had not included this in his prohibition. The tendency is to make God's prohibition unreasonable and more severe than it really is.

Questioning the certainty of punishment. Eve also questioned whether the prophesied punishment was certain. In quoting the punishment, she stated that God had said, "You will die" (Gen. 3:3), but she left out the word "surely." The certainty and extent of the punishment is not comprehended. The three elements in the woman's flawed comprehension of what God had said illustrate the human process in justifying one's response to temptation. Eve had not realized the extent of her freedom, had felt that God was too severe, and had questioned the certainty of the punishment.

In contrast to the woman's failure to respond appropriately to the serpent, the New Testament records that Christ replied to the temptation of Satan by quoting the Word of God accurately and decisively (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

Satan's Contradiction of the Word of God

Questioning the Word of God leads to contradiction and unbelief. Though at first Satan only questioned the Word of God, his method led to ultimate contradiction. He proceeded to deny the Word of God.

Satan's denial of the Word of God. Having discovered Eve's flawed comprehension of God's commands, including her obvious questioning as to whether the results of sin would be as God declared, Satan openly denied the Word of God when he said, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). This is the lie the world today believes in contradiction of the revealed Word of God. If there is no certain punishment for sin, then there is no certain reason for not sinning.

Satan questions the character of God. Questioning God's Word leads to questioning God's character. Satan questioned the character of God by implying that God is not good and is not concerned with bestowing good upon humankind. He charged, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). His implication was that God wanted to keep Adam and Eve from knowing good and evil lest they be like God. To

be like God was, of course, Satan's desire. He did not warn Adam and Eve that they would come into the knowledge of what is good without the power to do good and would have the knowledge of evil without the power to avoid evil.

Satan questions the certainty of judgment. Satan suggested that, inasmuch as the punishment is uncertain, disobedience will be rewarded, not judged. Denial of the Word of God, impugning the character of God, and questioning the judgment of God are the three major premises for sin as embraced by the human race.

The Revealed Pattern of Temptation

First John 2:16 describes how temptation comes to us: "For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world." As illustrated in the temptation of Eve, all temptation comes through one or more of the three major avenues of temptation.

The flesh. "The cravings of sinful man" (1 John 2:16) are the natural desires of the flesh, or the sin nature—"the fruit of the tree was good for food" (Gen. 3:6). It is only natural that humans as created would have an appetite for food, as this would be essential to their health and well-being. But like all other human inclinations, it must be controlled by the Word of God. In this case the natural human appetite in creation was to be controlled; humans were not allowed to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In their fallen state humans have a sin nature often referred to in Scripture as "the flesh," and though not all natural human cravings are evil, those that are evil lead humans to sin. Temptation not only comes to them along these three major lines, but often one aspect of this temptation becomes prominent in the life of individuals. The natural cravings of humans are illustrated in David's sin with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband Uriah (2 Sam. 11:1-27).

The desire for beauty. "The lust of his eyes" (1 John 2:16) is seen in the fact that the fruit was "pleasing to the eye" (Gen. 3:6). The love of beautiful things, whether beauty of form, color, or movement, was implanted in the original creation of humans. However, like other impulses of human nature even in their innocent form, it must be conformed to the control of the Word of God. Love of beautiful things can lead to materialism, wealth,

physical achievement, and the lure of beautiful women. All of this is illustrated in the life of Solomon, who loved beautiful things, beautiful women, and material benefits of life. Though Solomon is portrayed in Scripture as a man of unusual wisdom in many respects (1 Kings 4:29–34), he also was given to beautiful things (10:4–29). His love for beauty went beyond things that were within the will of God. The Scriptures simply say, “King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women” (11:1), and contrary to God’s command, he had acquired many horses and chariots (10:26–29). What is pleasing to the eye of sinful humans is not necessarily pleasing to God.

Pride. “Boasting of what he has and does” (1 John 2:16)—pride corresponds to “desirable for gaining wisdom” (Gen. 3:6). Here again Satan misrepresented partaking of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Eating the forbidden fruit would give humankind knowledge but not wisdom—that is, the ability to use knowledge in the proper way. Humans in their pride—“boasting of what he has and does” (1 John 2:16)—demonstrates their sinfulness, inadequacy, and lack of knowledge of God. Like the sin of Satan, human sin is centered in what humans are and can do. A scriptural illustration of pride is found in the history of Saul, who began in humility but ended in pride (1 Sam. 18:6–9).

Regardless of its particular point of attack, sin always results from a failure to comprehend the need for the control of God’s Word and from the false conclusion that sin provides benefits which would otherwise be lost.

The Fall: Result for Satan, Adam, and Eve (Gen. 3:7–21)

Judgment was immediate. When Adam and Eve partook of the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they gained from it an experience of such knowledge but without the power to do good and without the power to avoid evil. The result of their sin was to bring upon them immediate spiritual death and ultimately physical death (Gen. 5:5). Because of their sinful state and disobedience, they were alienated from God and afraid of his holy presence (3:8), as is humankind today apart from the grace of God.

The result of the sin of Adam and Eve was that they became sinners by nature and in action (Gen. 3:7–21). After partaking of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve for

the first time became aware of their nakedness and sewed fig leaves to make a covering for themselves. This is typical of man’s vain attempts to hide his sinfulness from God.

Because Adam and Eve were now afraid of God, when they heard the sound of God walking in the garden, they attempted to hide from God (Gen. 3:8). One of the tragic results of sin is that it breaks fellowship between humans and a holy God.

God’s penetrating question was, “Where are you?” In his omniscience, of course, God knew where Adam and Eve were. His question was intended to evoke a response from them. The intended answer, however, was not locale but was related to the fact that Adam and Eve were now in sin.

When Adam told God he was afraid because he was naked, God replied, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” (Gen. 3:11).

Adam gave the lame excuse, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (Gen. 3:12). Here, as always, humans attempt to blame others for their sins. Adam implied that God was to blame because he gave Eve to him, and she led him into sin.

When God asked Eve, “What is this you have done?” she replied, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Gen. 3:13), excusing herself on the basis that she was tempted by Satan. As this passage makes abundantly clear, though there may be excuses and reasons for temptation, the guilt of sin remains with the one who yields to the temptation.

The Judgment

The judgment: Death. The results of eating of the forbidden fruit were summarized in the judgment of death that affected Satan, Adam, and Eve. The serpent was condemned to crawl on his belly (Gen. 3:14), and Satan’s ultimate defeat is captured in the sweeping prophecy, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (v. 15). The descendants of Adam and Eve will be in continual strife and contention with the offspring of Satan, the demon world as well as wicked humans. The ultimate struggle, however, will be that the serpent will have his head crushed, a deadly blow, though he will strike the heel of the offspring of the woman. This will

be treated next in the study of prophecies that anticipate the downfall of Satan.

The curse. God pronounced upon Eve the curse of increased pain in childbearing (Gen. 3:16). In addition God declared, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). The phrase, "Your desire will be for your husband" refers to the woman's desire for man leading her by domination. Adam was declared to be her master, who would "rule over" her.

To Adam, God declared that the ground would be cursed and would bring forth fruit only as a result of painful toil. The ground he tilled would ultimately receive his dead body; he would return to the dust from which he was made (Gen. 3:17-19).

The divine provision of blood redemption. In the midst of this scene of judgment and death, blood redemption was introduced. The conclusion of the incident is provided in Genesis 3:21: "The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them." Though not explained here, for the first time the principle of blood redemption was introduced. An animal had to be killed to provide the skin to cover Adam and Eve. Typically, it graciously represented God's salvation in grace in contrast to the fig leaves of humanity's own righteousness.

Summary

Prophecy true in details. The first prophecy, with its pronouncement of judgment upon the sin of disobedience, provides important guidelines for interpreting prophecy. Prophecy is not only fulfilled in general terms but specifically corresponds to the details of each prophetic pronouncement, as in this case.

Prophecy to be interpreted literally. Prophecy is not only to be interpreted in detail, but literally. Adam and Eve literally died spiritually and ultimately died physically. Even their redemption, which God apparently provided, did not stop the process of physical death.

Revelation of the nature of temptation. In the details of the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, all the indications of what normally takes place in a temptation are mentioned: (1) denial of the truth and even of the content of prophecy; (2) the danger of inadequate comprehension that God means exactly what he says in describing prophetic events; and (3) Satan's method of

casting doubt on or denying the Word of God, questioning the character of God, and the teaching that disobedience to God results in gain, not loss.

The initial account of human sin provides the elements that explain all subsequent acts of disobedience and sin from the time of Adam and Eve until the Consummation.

3

Salvation and Spiritual Warfare

Genesis 3:15 records the curse God placed on Satan: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

One of the common experiences all Christians share is the conflict with temptation after they have been saved. Though salvation introduces the hope of eternal life, it does not eliminate the problems Christians have with their sin nature, the sinful world, or Satan.

Eden Replaced by a Sinful World

Paradise lost. The entrance of sin had changed the Garden of Paradise into a world of sin and death. The opening chapters of Genesis record the creation of Paradise for Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:8-17), but they also record how Paradise was lost (3:1-24). Instead of abundant life, now their lot is characterized by physical and spiritual death. The pleasant surroundings of the

garden are now replaced by a world of pain and suffering. Instead of abundance, they now will endure toil, sweat, and tears. From perfect fellowship with God as provided in creation, they now will face spiritual death, separation, and alienation from God.

As a result of the dramatic change brought about by the advent of sin into the human situation, God pronounced judgments related to life for Satan and for fallen men and women, conditions that would continue at least until the millennial kingdom of Christ.

The curse on Satan. The original sin of Satan in heaven, when as a holy angel he rebelled against God, now spread to the world of Adam and Eve. The result was that both Satan and the created world came under God's curse. Satan, who had spoken through the serpent, received first of all the pronouncement, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life" (Gen. 3:14).

The curse upon creation. A curse was also pronounced upon the human race. The sin of Adam and Eve not only plunged them and the human race into sin, but apparently extended to the created world, to both the animate and the inanimate aspects of creation. The apostle Paul wrote, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:22-23).

The question is often raised as to how a good God could create such a world of sin and death. The answer is that he did not; man's choosing the path of sin caused this. As illustrated in the curse pronounced on Adam and Eve, they would now labor in a difficult world of pain, suffering, sweat, toil, and death. Our present world with its sickness, catastrophe, earthquakes, sorrow, and death exemplifies the results of sin. A reminder of this is reflected in the curse upon the serpent: he was required by God to crawl on his belly and eat dust even though he was beautiful in design.

As Satan is the embodiment of satanic religion and the object of worship in some pagan religions, so he was put down by the greater power of God and labored under a curse of being anti-God, subject to divine judgment. The far-reaching effect of this

curse upon Satan and creation is all too evident in the history of the world (Rom. 2) in the enmity between Satan and the woman.

Enmity between Satan and the woman. God further declared, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman" (Gen. 3:15). As a result of the fall into sin, the world is engulfed in spiritual warfare between the descendants of the woman, pictured as opposing Satan, and Satan and those who are in allegiance to him, whether fallen angels or the human race. This warfare has an early illustration in Cain and Abel as Cain, representing evil, kills Abel, representing righteousness (4:8).

Spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare continued not only in that which is visible between the righteous and the evil but also in the unseen contest between the demon world led by Satan and the holy angels led by Michael. Paul put it like this: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). In this warfare the child of God is encouraged to put on the full armor of God (vv. 13–18). Christ had this in mind when he said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The appalling sin, suffering, and death that characterizes our present world had its source in the original sin of Adam and Eve and God's resulting curse upon the created world.

Human suffering. The enmity of Satan is particularly against those who are identified as the people of God, the holy angels, and all who are saved. Accordingly, in the permission of God, Christians have been afflicted, have suffered, and have even been martyred in the continuous spiritual conflict. Here is the ultimate explanation of human suffering—a puzzle to human philosophy that attempts to solve these problems without divine revelation. The disordered world is a result of sin, and only the order Christ himself can bring into the human life or to the world as a whole, as in the millennial kingdom, will restore peace and victory.

The Promise of the Ultimately Victorious Redeemer

Victory over sin and death is promised. In his final pronouncement upon Satan, God said, "He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:15). Though the preceding verse referred to individuals in the plural, the final victory will be

caused by one who is declared here to be the seed of the woman, anticipating the Virgin Birth. "He," referring to Christ, "will crush your head"—that is, inflict a mortal wound on Satan that will be devastating and lead to his ultimate judgment. This first promise of the Redeemer and Savior begins the long line of prophecy through the Scriptures of the godly seed leading to Christ, including Abel, Seth, and Noah (Gen. 4:4, 25; 6:8–10); Shem (9:26–27); Abraham (12:1–4); Isaac (17:19–21); Jacob (28:10–14); Judah (49:10); David (2 Sam. 7:5–17); and Christ as Emmanuel (Isa. 9:6–7).

The final pronouncement on Satan was that he would strike the heel of the offspring of the woman, indicating the crucifixion of Christ as well as all the harm done to and through the human race. The ultimate result will be that Satan himself will be judged, and salvation will triumph.

The Curse Upon the Woman

Eve, representative of the women of the world, was cursed. Because of the sin of Adam and Eve the lot of women would be painful. There would first of all be increased childbearing, made necessary by death, and increased pain in childbearing (Gen. 3:16). Her relationship to her husband would be one of submission as he would rule her. The curse is made more severe by the fact that often in human relationships both the man and the woman are unsaved and not able to achieve the fellowship that is possible for believers in Christ who are married.

The Curse Upon Adam

Adam, representing the human race, was cursed because of sin. Because Adam had heeded his wife and had partaken of the fruit, disobeying God's expressed command, the ground was cursed because of him: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food" (Gen. 3:17–19). No longer would he experience the joy of partaking of fruit in the beautiful garden. Now the earth would be cursed and growing food would be difficult.

Even as Adam wrested food from the soil, the food he would eat in turn would ultimately be taken back by the soil from

which he had been originally created. God said, "For dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19). The entrance of sin had changed God's beautiful creation into a world of conflict, sorrow, and death.

The woman, created equal to the man in many respects, though different, would have multiplied sorrow and trouble. The easy living in the garden would be replaced by toil. Joy would be replaced by sorrow, and life with its mortality would be the lot of man instead of immortality. The world as a whole would be caught up in the deceptive power of Satan. Christians, representing those redeemed by the blood of Christ, would be engaged in spiritual warfare beyond their strength or ability and would suffer conflict, pain, and ultimately death. Although victory in Christ would finally be achieved, the paradise provided for Adam and Eve was now lost.

The Promise of Salvation Symbolized by Garments of Skin for Adam and Eve

God promised salvation. To replace Adam and Eve's self-made garments of leaves, which were now inappropriate and inadequate, God provided for them garments of skin. This provision involved the slaying of an animal and the shedding of blood. In this way, salvation and redemption by blood was symbolized as being the only way by which human sin could be temporarily covered or the victory could ultimately be wrought.

Though Adam and Eve were given the provision of salvation in type, God drove them out of the garden and made it impossible for them to return and partake of the Tree of Life that would have given them physical immortality. Now that they had sinned, it would be far better for their bodies to die and to return to dust to be reclaimed in the beauty of resurrection in holiness and righteousness. Though a judgment from God, it was an act of mercy and grace as well (Gen. 3:22-24). In cameo form Genesis 2 and 3 reflect the whole of human history leading up to the consummation, when the present heaven and earth will be destroyed.

4

Prophecy and the Covenant With Noah

"So the LORD said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them'" (Gen. 6:7).

The Motif of Blessing and Cursing

Introductory character of Genesis 1-11. In the early chapters of Genesis a mixed motif of blessing and cursing was revealed. The record was not intended to be a complete history of the human race. Only eleven chapters were used to trace the entire history of the world from creation to Abraham. By contrast, Genesis 12-50, a far longer section, was devoted to the story of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve sons of Jacob, a few hundred years. Most conservative scholars agree that Moses was the author of Genesis and wrote it as a background to the history of Israel. Guided by the Spirit and providing general truths for all people, Moses justified God's selecting from the mass of

humanity a particular family, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve sons of Jacob, as the objects of his special care and revelation. The justification for this selective process is found in the sequence of blessing and cursing as it unfolds in the early chapters of Genesis. This process continues in our present world as some are saved and others lost.

The blessing of redemption from sin. There may have been an earlier judgment on the angels before man was created. In the statement "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep" (Gen. 1:2), one may perhaps read that the earth's devastation and incomplete character was due to the judgment of the fallen angels much earlier than the creation of humanity. Though this is not entirely clear in Scripture, it is possible that, in condemning the angels who sinned, God also judged and destroyed the earth, though it had been perfect previously. In the reconstruction of the earth in Genesis, God was setting the stage for humans to inhabit the earth. Creation therefore was presented as a step of blessing after failure on the part of the angels. In this preparation of the earth for human habitation, God would introduce redemption from sin after Adam and Eve failed. In contrast, the fallen angels have no way of salvation or redemption.

The movement to sin and cursing and then blessing. The changing scene from blessing to cursing is seen in the Garden of Eden. The perfection of the Garden of Eden and the innocent state of humans was suddenly terminated by the sin of Adam and Eve, resulting in God's curse upon Satan, the ground, and Adam and Eve.

The movement from blessing to cursing and then back to blessing was introduced in the garments of skin (Gen. 3:21), which signified the blessing of redemption through shed blood.

The grace extended by God to Adam and Eve, however, was followed by continual human failure, as indicated in the murder of Abel and the wickedness of subsequent generations. This failure set the stage for another step of divine judgment upon the world in the form of the Flood.

The Flood: A new beginning for Noah and his family. In the flood of Noah a new start was made (Gen. 6:1-8:22). Noah and his family were a righteous island in a sea of corruption. In this family the human race was continued. The scene changed from cursing to blessing, to be followed by another failure.

Movement back to sin and cursing. As the account of Noah

and subsequent generations unfolds, after the Flood there was again failure (Gen. 9:20-23). Noah's descendants attempted to build the Tower of Babel in defiance of the true God (11:1-9). This justified God's judgment on the Tower of Babel as well as his selection of Abraham for a new start and a new work of grace and blessing for those who are redeemed.

The call of Abraham. A new return to blessing followed the judgment on the Tower of Babel. Having demonstrated the evil of the human race generally, the narration of Genesis now turns to the particular family with which God would deal in special grace and through which God would bring redemption in Christ. Genesis 1-11, accordingly, is an introduction and an explanation of why God chose Abraham and his descendants for a special favor.

Noah's Commission to Build the Ark (Gen. 6:9-7:5)

God's purpose to destroy life and cleanse the earth (Gen. 6:4-7). Hundreds of years had passed since God created Adam and Eve. God had blessed Seth as a descendant of Adam to replace the murdered Abel (Gen. 4:25), but the race as a whole continued its mad course of disobedience to God. In the time of Noah the entire human race, with the exception of Noah and his family, had rebelled against God. Accordingly, Noah was commissioned to build an ark to save the race from extinction (6:5-7:5).

Noah and his family alone in favor with God (Gen. 6:8-9). Of the human race only Noah and his family, descendants of Seth, were still honoring the Lord. In his plan to destroy the earth, God determined to save Noah and his family and through them to make a new beginning of the human race.

Instructions for building the ark and saving the animals and birds in addition to Noah's own family (Gen. 6:13-22). The ark as described by God had the dimensions of a large seagoing vessel able to withstand the storms of the Flood and having ample accommodations for the animals as well as Noah and his family. The dimensions of the ark as recorded in Scripture stand in sharp contrast to the mythological accounts of the Flood, which in some cases picture an ark 3,000 feet long and 1,200 feet wide, which would be impossible to build and would not be seaworthy.

Noah was instructed to bring into the ark two pairs of birds

and beasts but with a special provision in regard to clean animals. He was to bring seven pairs of these and also seven pairs of birds, for the purpose of keeping their various species alive (Gen. 7:2-3). In addition, Noah was instructed to take in food for his family as well as for the animals (6:21). In building the ark and providing provisions for the time of the Flood, Noah was completely obedient to God (7:5).

The Destruction of the Genesis Flood (Gen. 7:6-24)

The Flood begins. Once the ark was completed and the animals and Noah's family entered, the Flood began (Gen. 7:6-24). Noah and his family entered the ark on the tenth day of the second month, seven days before the Flood came (vv. 4, 10). This was in the six hundredth year of Noah's life. On the seventeenth day of the second month the floods began. "On that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights" (vv. 11-12). In addition to the rain that fell, water was released from the ocean, possibly caused by great earthquakes which opened up subterranean water. However it may be explained, it apparently added to the Flood and caused the Flood to come on quickly.

The water recedes. After the rain stopped on the twenty-seventh day of the third month (Gen. 7:12), the water receded for another 110 days, making a total of 150 days in which the water prevailed on the earth. Finally the ark rested on Mount Ararat on the seventeenth day of the seventh month (7:24; 8:4).

The water continues to recede. For 150 days after the ark rested on Mount Ararat the water continued to recede. On the first day of the tenth month, the tops of the mountains became visible, 74 days after the ark rested on Mount Ararat (Gen. 8:5). Another 40 days followed. Then Noah sent out a raven and a dove to explore the situation. This occurred on the eleventh day of the eleventh month (vv. 6-9). The dove returned, having apparently found no place to rest.

After seven more days passed, the dove was sent out, but this time it returned with a leaf, indicating its discovery of vegetation. This occurred on the eighteenth day of the eleventh month (Gen. 8:10-11). Seven days later, the dove was sent out a third time and did not return (v. 12). Another 22 days later, or 150

days after the ark had rested on the mountain, the water continued to recede (v. 3, 13).

Dry land reappears. Dry land reappeared in the six hundred and first year, the first day of the first month (Gen. 8:13). Finally, on the twenty-seventh day of the second month, the land was completely dry (vv. 14-19), and Noah was able to leave the ark. The total number of days spent in the ark, including the seven days of waiting, were 377 days or one year and 17 days. In all of this, prophecy was being fulfilled. When the animals and birds left the ark, Noah and his family also returned to the earth.

The Covenant With Noah (Gen. 8:20-9:17)

Noah's sacrifice (Gen. 8:20). Upon leaving the ark, Noah built an altar to the Lord and offered a sacrifice of clean animals and clean birds (v. 20). In so doing, he expressed once again his devotion to God and his recognition of the need of blood sacrifice, sacrifice which had been impossible while on the ark. In reply, God gave Noah a new covenant that he would never again judge the earth with a flood (8:21-9:17).

In response to Noah's pleasing sacrifice, God declared, "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Gen. 8:21-22). Though God might inflict other punishments upon humans because of their sin, there never would be another universal destruction by a flood. Other Scriptures reveal that the present earth will ultimately be destroyed by fire before the new heaven and new earth are created (2 Peter 3:10-13).

God's covenant with Noah included a number of promises. (1) Noah was instructed, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth" (Gen. 9:1). (2) God placed everything in creation under human authority, whether beasts or birds or fish (vv. 2-3). (3) For the first time God gave Noah the right not only to eat of the green plants but to eat meat from animals (vv. 3-6). Before this, the human race had been vegetarian. In eating meat, however, they were commanded not to leave the lifeblood in it (v. 4), and a new regulation was added recognizing the sanctity of human life. God said, "And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the

blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (vv. 5-6). (4) God promised that he would never again bring a flood on the earth like the flood of Noah. "I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth" (v. 11).

The sign of the covenant (Gen. 9:12-16). As a sign of the promise never again to destroy the earth with a flood, God set a rainbow in the clouds. Rain seems to have fallen for the first time in connection with the Flood, and it is not likely, therefore, that there were rainbows prior to this time. Before this, a mist seems to have watered the earth (2:5-6). In any case, from this point on, the rainbow became a sign of the covenant with Noah regarding universal judgment on the earth. The sign was therefore established not only to signify the covenant with Noah but with all life on earth. God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth" (9:17).

The prophecy involved in the covenant of Noah brought a new situation. Once again, in spite of sin and judgment, God brought blessing on the earth, repeating the cycle of blessing followed by cursing then followed by blessing.

Noah's Sin

Noah becomes drunk (Gen. 9:20-21). Even though the earth had been cleansed and Noah and his family rescued from the Flood, the narrative immediately confronts us with the fact that the Flood had not changed the character of humans. Noah, though a righteous man, having made wine from grapes from the vineyard he planted, became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent (v. 21).

The sin of Ham. Ham, coming into his father's tent, saw him uncovered and apparently joked about this with his two brothers Shem and Japheth (Gen. 9:22). Shem and Japheth, however, recognizing the problem, walked backward and covered their father's nakedness so they would not see their father in his drunken state (v. 23).

Noah's prophecy. When Noah awoke and discovered what had happened, he pronounced a solemn curse upon Canaan, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers" (Gen. 9:25).

Though a number of explanations have been given to the incident of Ham and his father, the best explanation seems to be that exposure of a father in the ancient world was considered a serious sin reflecting on the sanctity of the human family and on the dignity of fatherhood. The Canaanites, who were Ham's descendants, became a very wicked people and were perpetually enemies of Israel. They were particularly involved in sexual sin. Subsequent history recorded that the Canaanites occupied the place of slaves in relationship to Israel. This did not immediately stem from Noah's condemnation but rather as a judgment of God upon them for their licentious lives. In Genesis 14 the Canaanites were enslaved by kings from the East, and later the Gibeonites, who also were descendants of Ham, became water carriers and woodcutters for the congregation and altar of the Lord (Josh. 9:27).

The concept that this explains the slavery of blacks is not scriptural, therefore, as it is questionable whether the Canaanites were black. The prediction rather anticipated the sinfulness of those who came from the Canaanite line and prophesied that their sins would be judged by servitude. Eventually the Canaanites disappeared from the pages of history.

In contrast, Noah blessed Japheth, implying that his descendants would be a great people. Shem was blessed with Canaan as his slave: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave" (Gen. 9:26-27). The accounts of Noah's and Ham's sin after the Flood are part of the pattern of the early chapters of Genesis, showing that after blessing there often comes sin and cursing. For that reason God selected a particular family to bless and to use in the generations ahead.

The Epilogue: The Tower of Babel

Decision to build a tower (Gen. 11:1-4). The sinfulness of the human race was illustrated in the building of a tower. The descendants of Noah decided to build a great tower, or ziggurat, as a unifying symbol lest they be scattered over the earth (v. 4). Ziggurats were generally used in the worship of pagan gods.

God confused their language. In response to the people's sinful behavior, God confused their language, saying, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this,

then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other" (Gen. 11:6-7).

Confusion introduced in the earth (Gen. 11:8-9). By introducing languages the people could not understand, God brought into the earthen element that has hindered the unification of the human race in its common endeavors ever since. The tower was called "Babel," meaning "confused." This name led to the word "Babylon," an area that became significant in subsequent world events.

Conclusion of the cycle of blessing and cursing. The cycle of blessing and cursing in Genesis 1-11 ends with Abraham. Having traced the course of blessing and cursing from Genesis 1 through 11:9, the Bible now sets the stage for God's declaration of his special purpose, beginning with Abraham. In writing the history of the world extending over thousands of years in such brief compass, Moses was preparing the way for God's purpose through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which would occupy not only the book of Genesis but the rest of the Bible. The prophecies made and fulfilled emphasized that redemption is selective. Not all will be saved, not all will be blessed, not all will be cursed, but God has a plan for the human race that includes the redemption and salvation of the elect as well as the damnation of the unrepentant. The early chapters of Genesis present in cameo the entire history of the human race.

The principles of fulfilled prophecy confirmed. The events of the Flood confirm the principles of interpreting prophecy and fulfillment. The Flood was literal. The judgment of the Flood destroying life on earth was literal. The events that followed the Flood were also literal. The Flood proved that prophecy is specific and that details are subject to literal fulfillment. This leads to the conclusion that the revelation given to Abraham is also subject to literal fulfillment.

5

The Prophetic Covenant With Abraham

"The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'" (Gen. 12:1-3).

A New Beginning

Abraham chosen. Beginning with Abraham, Scripture charts a new course for God's people. The choice of Abraham marked a new narrowing of the redemptive purpose of God. As we saw in the previous eleven chapters of Genesis, in beginning the human race God selected Abel to exemplify the righteous line. After Abel was killed, he was replaced by Seth (Gen. 4:25). The human race having been destroyed by the Flood, God began again with Noah, a descendant of Seth, and Noah's three sons

(5:32). God selected Shem as the ancestor of the godly line. After the judgment of the human race at the Tower of Babel, God chose Terah (11:26) and, through Terah, his son Abraham to be the progenitor of the godly line.

Genesis: History of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The book of Genesis is largely occupied with the history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Humanity began in the Garden of Eden and moved to Egypt. Genesis was the book of beginnings only, however. The line of Abraham continued through Isaac (Gen. 21:12), Jacob (25:23; 28:13–15), Judah (49:10), David (2 Sam. 7:9–11, 16), Nathan (Luke 3:31), and Mary (Matt. 1:16) to Jesus Christ.

Redemption as a purpose of God. The importance of God's choosing a people becomes obvious as his plan for redemption unfolds. From Genesis 12 through the book of Revelation, Israel is shown to be one of the major purposes of God. God revealed himself through the prophets of Israel, through both his blessing and judging of Israel, through the twelve apostles and other writers of Scripture, and ultimately through Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior. In addition to God's purpose for Israel in the redemptive plan as revealed in the Old Testament, the New Testament imparts the special purpose of God in the present age of calling out his church composed of both Jews and Gentiles. The prophecies of Scripture provide the background and outline for the destiny of the human race and especially God's plan of eternal salvation for his elect, or chosen ones.

The Provisions of the Covenant

Abraham instructed to go to the Promised Land. Certain promises stand out in God's covenant with Abraham. As the introduction to the covenant states (Gen. 12:1), Abraham had been called to leave his home and relatives in Ur of the Chaldeans and go to a land that God would show him. As there is some indication that Abraham was in a comfortable and prosperous situation in Ur, the call of God to go to a strange land and live in a tent with his household was not an enticing one. The fact that Abraham and his father started out for the Promised Land is evidence that though they may have participated in the worship of pagan deities of the time, at this important juncture in their life they recognized the true God and henceforth obeyed and worshiped him. Their path of obedience, however, was not perfect.

Abraham had been told to leave not only his country but also his people and his father's household. Circumstances combined to make this a difficult command, because Abraham recognized the leadership of his father, and his father took the initiative to involve Abraham as well as his great-nephew Lot on the journey. Further, they settled in Haran (Gen. 11:31) and stayed there until Abraham's father died. It was only then that Abraham left for the final destination, and it was not until later that he separated from Lot (13:5–11).

The promise of a great nation. In addition to the important place of the land in God's covenant with Abraham, God promised that Abraham would father many descendants. The central promise of the prophetic covenant given to Abraham is contained in the statement, "I will make you into a great nation" (Gen. 12:2). Abraham was destined to be the progenitor of many nations, but most important, he was to be the progenitor of the line that would lead to Jesus Christ. The nation that came from Abraham would be great not only in number, as God frequently reminded Abraham, but also great in importance.

In attempting to understand the revelation God gave Abraham, the interpreter of the Abrahamic promise is faced with the decision as to whether this should be taken in its literal meaning, that is, physical descendants, as premillenarians believe, or whether it should be spiritualized to represent the spiritual company of the elect of Israel and even of Gentiles, as amillenarians believe. As the exposition of the covenant throughout the book of Genesis will demonstrate, the promise was literal, that is, Abraham understood the promise of a great nation to refer to his physical descendants, and this was also God's intent.

Because so many try to understand prophecy as nonliteral and sometimes in a vague sense, it is important to understand that the promise was literal. That Abraham would also have spiritual children (Gal. 3:6–9) does not change the literal promise. Even the spiritual children of Abraham were a literal fulfillment of prophecy. The lineage from Abraham to Christ is a literal lineage, and Christ was literally born. The fulfillment of the literal promise was essential to God's purpose not only for the physical seed of Abraham but also for the spiritual seed. Without the literal, the spiritual could not have been fulfilled. It is significant that Galatians 3:5 does not trace the promise to the covenant that made Abraham the progenitor of the great nation

of Israel, but rather to the promise of blessings to all people (Gen. 12:3), which is literally being fulfilled by Christ as the Savior.

The promise of personal blessing. The promise of personal blessing to Abraham was a central feature of the Abrahamic covenant. God stated three aspects of this, "I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing" (Gen. 12:2). These personal blessings were also literally fulfilled.

Fulfillment of the covenant to Abraham. First, the covenant anticipated prophetically how God's hand of blessing would rest upon Abraham. This is illustrated throughout his life in that God made him a wealthy man, a powerful man, and a miraculous channel through which Isaac was to be born. Abraham was blessed above any other person in his generation, and this promise, like other promises in the covenant, was literally fulfilled.

Second, Abraham was promised that his name would be great—that is, he would be a major actor in God's redemptive program. He is mentioned as Abram or Abraham about three hundred times in the Bible. Unquestionably, he is one of the most important characters of the Old Testament and is mentioned many times in the New Testament as well. This prophecy has been literally fulfilled.

Third, God declared to Abraham, "You will be a blessing" (Gen. 12:2). Unquestionably, Abraham was a blessing to his own generation and to his own family, and through the centuries he has been an illustration of faith and obedience that has challenged all who follow the Lord. God's faithful dealings with Abraham, even when he fell short of perfect obedience, are a great encouragement to the people of God and help to fulfill this promise. The ultimate fulfillment, however, is found in the aspects of the covenant referring to blessings on the whole world.

Fulfillment of the covenant to nations dealing with Israel. The covenant included promises of blessing and cursing on the nations. In recognition of the greatness of Abraham and of the promises that God gave him, God declared, "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse" (Gen. 12:3). This prophecy is intrinsic in the nature of the case as those who bless God will bless Abraham and those who curse God will curse Abraham. God, however, makes this a general principle that is observed throughout history. The nations that

have been kind to Israel have in turn been blessed by God even though they were evil nations. Those who cursed Israel because of her wickedness and rebellion against God received God's righteous judgment. This has been illustrated in the great nations of the world. Egypt, the greatest nation of the ancient world, served Israel well for several generations but ended up enslaving Israel. This was the ultimate downfall of Egypt, and God's judgment on Egypt has been executed so faithfully throughout history that even today she is a minor nation.

The Assyrian Empire also comes under this pronouncement, for Assyria was the nation that led the ten tribes into captivity (722 B.C.). Though Assyria was an instrument of divine judgment, nevertheless, when Nineveh fell in 612 B.C., the nation was suddenly and completely destroyed. The story is not yet complete, for God, in fulfillment of prophecy, is dealing and will continue to deal with Syria in judgment. Babylon also, though the captor of the two tribes of Israel, faced judgment in history in the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C., and prophetic Scripture describes the ultimate fall of Babylon in its modern character (Rev. 17-18).

The Medes and the Persians, who followed the Babylonians, were relatively kind to Israel and permitted her return to the land. Medo-Persia continued for two hundred years without serious intervention by God.

In the Grecian Empire God dealt with each portion of the empire according to its dealings with Israel. He especially judged Antiochus Epiphanes.

The Roman Empire, the greatest of the empires of biblical times, was gradually destroyed. In later years Spain, Germany, Russia, and other countries that persecuted the Jews suffered God's judgment. By contrast, the United States, relatively kind to the Jews, has had unusual blessings in spite of her many shortcomings. The principle of blessing those who bless Abraham and his posterity and cursing those who curse Abraham and his posterity has been fulfilled to the present hour and will continue in the future.

Fulfillment of the covenant to all peoples. The greatest promise given to Abraham was that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). As has already been brought out, this is fulfilled in God's unfolding plan for Abraham and his posterity. Blessing has come to Israel and to the world as a whole through the prophets, through the writers of Scripture,

through the apostles, and preeminently through Jesus Christ. Blessings which God has promised Abraham have been showered on the recipients through many centuries up to the present time and will continue until the end of human history.

In studying the Abrahamic promise, care must be taken to observe meticulously the difference in the promises. Some promises were addressed to Abraham himself—namely, that he would be the father of a great nation and would have a great name and would experience God's personal blessing. Some promises applied to his physical posterity, for more than one great nation descended from him. Some promises would be fulfilled by Israel. The promises have to be observed as they unfold, as some of the promises were given to a portion of Abraham's descendants but not to all. The greatest of all promises, of course, was the promise of blessing to all peoples of the earth, and it is here that the church of the New Testament comes in (Gal. 3:6–9). The interpretation that the church is blessed because it is the inheritor of Israel's promises is not what the Scriptures teach. It is rather that through Abraham, the man of faith, "all peoples" who trust in God as Abraham did will be blessed through Abraham and his posterity.

Important Aspects of the Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant

The covenant with Abraham requires study along several lines.

Physical descendants of Abraham. First, the Abrahamic promises were fulfilled in those who descended physically from Abraham. The guiding hand of God and the tremendous extended revelation given to the sons of Abraham merit a study of this line of truth.

Promise of the land. Second, the promise of the land remained a central doctrine of the Abrahamic covenant and one that is most revealing in connection with the issue of whether the promises of Abraham are literal and unconditional.

Promise of kings. Third, the promise that through Abraham would come kings was fulfilled primarily through David, and is another area of prophecy traced through Scriptures into the prophetic future.

Promise of grace to Israel as well as to all believers. Fourth, the new covenant, providing God's grace for Israel as well as for

all who trust in Christ, is another major outgrowth of the Abrahamic covenant. Although it stands as a separate covenant, obviously its roots come from the promise of God to bless all people of the earth through Abraham. The new covenant, continuing as it does in the New Testament, provides a major revelation of God's plan of grace for those who trust him.

These major fulfillments of the Abrahamic covenant are worthy of separate study and will be undertaken in succeeding chapters. These fulfillments are not only important for an understanding of prophecy, but they are the basis of our faith that God will fulfill his promises to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. Israel is a great example of the fact that God keeps his Word. The very existence of Israel today, four thousand years after Abraham, is a reminder that God continues to keep his Word even through thousands of years. Christians can rest assured that in the years ahead, God, who does not change, will continue to keep his promises to them.

6

The Messianic Genealogy of Jesus Christ

The Promise of a Great Nation

The promise of the covenant (Gen. 12:1–3). In the original covenant given to Abraham, he was promised that he would be the forefather of a great nation. Abraham was already an old man when the promise was given, and he was childless. The delay occasioned by Abraham's stay in Haran resulted in Abraham being seventy-five years of age before he arrived in the land (v. 4). Obviously the covenant depended on Abraham having descendants, and it became increasingly evident that he might not have an heir. This was a trial of Abraham's faith and became a greater problem as the years rolled on. Though not clearly stated in the original promise, the fact that his posterity would be a blessing to all nations involved not only Abraham's being the forefather of a great nation, but also his serving as a forefather of the line leading to Jesus Christ.

Suggestion that Eliezer be an heir rejected. When another ten years had elapsed with no heir, Abraham suggested that Eliezer,

a favorite servant, be made his heir. But Abraham's offer of Eliezer of Damascus as his heir was rejected by God. Abraham said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" (Gen. 15:2). He continued, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir" (v. 3). According to the customs of that day, a couple with no heir would pass on their estate to a designated servant.

The Lord's answer was clear and emphatic; the promise of a son was to be literally fulfilled: "Then the word of the LORD came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir'" (Gen. 15:4). God then told Abraham, "'Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'" (v. 5).

In support of the promise of God, Scripture records that God made a covenant with Abraham concerning the promise of the land to his descendants and gave the geographic description of it (Gen. 15:18–21). Obviously a literal land with literal boundaries was indicated.

Ishmael rejected (Gen. 16:1–16; 17:15–19). Sarah, recognizing the problem of not having a son and heir and feeling somewhat responsible because she should have been a mother of a child, suggested to Abraham that he have a child by Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant that he had brought back from Egypt. Ishmael was born, and when he had reached his early teens, Abraham still had no other child.

The promise of a son reaffirmed. The birth of Ishmael was not God's plan. When Abram was ninety-nine years of age (Gen. 17:1), God reaffirmed his covenant. Abram's name was changed to Abraham, meaning "father of many." He was given the added information:

I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God. (vv. 6–8)

After instituting the rite of circumcision as a sign of the covenant, "God also said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her'" (Gen. 17:15-16). The name Sarai, possibly meaning "contentious," is changed to Sarah, meaning "princess." This is partially in recognition of the fact that kings would come from her.

The pronouncement from God that Sarah would have a child moved Abraham to laughter. "Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?' And Abraham said to God, 'If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!'" (Gen. 17:17-18). God however, reaffirmed his promise: "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him" (v. 19). In recognition of the fact that Abraham had laughed to himself, God gave Abraham's promised son the name Isaac, meaning "he laughs." God subsequently revealed that Ishmael would also become a nation (v. 20).

In Genesis 18 we read, "The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day" (v. 1). Abraham saw three men approaching him. In keeping with the rules of traditional courtesy, he invited them to remain, to wash their feet, and to rest and be refreshed. Abraham instructed Sarah to prepare bread while he ran to the herd and selected a young calf, which he prepared for their meal. The men asked, "Where is your wife Sarah?" Abraham replied, "There, in the tent" (v. 9).

Scripture continues, "Then the LORD said, 'I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son'" (Gen. 18:10). The change in the text from the three men speaking to that of the Lord himself would indicate that one of the three men was a theophany—that is, an appearance of Jesus Christ in the form of an angel—and the other two men who accompanied him were angels. Sarah, who was now ninety years of age, was listening at the door of the tent. Scripture explains, "Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing" (v. 11). When Sarah heard the prophecy that she would have a son, she

"laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?'" (v. 12).

"Then the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, "Will I really have a child, now that I am old?" Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son'" (Gen. 18:13-14). The record then reveals, "Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, 'I did not laugh,'" to which the Lord replied, "Yes, you did laugh" (v. 15).

At the conclusion of this interview the Lord told Abraham about the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. This introduces the account of Lot leaving Sodom and the city being destroyed.

The birth of Isaac fulfills the promise (Gen. 21:8). Twenty-five years after Abraham left Haran, as he waited for some evidence of the covenant being fulfilled, the promise of God, impossible as it seemed to Abraham and Sarah, was fulfilled, and Isaac was born. In recognition that Isaac was a covenant child, Abraham circumcised him on the eighth day (v. 4). When Isaac was finally weaned, Abraham held a great feast in honor of his son (v. 8).

The narrative of ten chapters of Scripture, from the time the covenant was given to the time Isaac was born, emphasizes the importance of this fulfilled prophecy. In keeping with many other scriptural instances, the prophecy was fulfilled literally, not figuratively or nonliterally. The answer came in spite of Abraham and Sarah's unbelief and their inability to contemplate the omnipotence of God in doing what is impossible to humans. The fulfillment of the promise illustrates again the unconditional and absolutely certain fulfillment required in the provisions and promises of the Abrahamic covenant.

The Birth of Jacob and Esau

Jacob and Esau born to Isaac. As in the case of Abraham, where a long delay occurred between the giving of the promise and its fulfillment, so it was in the birth of Jacob and Esau to Isaac. In the beautiful story of the servant of Abraham seeking a bride for Isaac (Gen. 24), Rebekah is selected and becomes the wife of Isaac. In due time Abraham died, leaving everything to Isaac (Gen. 25:5-11).

As the years passed, however, Isaac became concerned

because his wife, like Sarah, was barren. "Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant" (Gen. 25:21). By this time Isaac was sixty years old (v. 26).

The older, Esau, to serve the younger, Jacob. When Rebekah became conscious that she was to bear twins, she inquired of the Lord as to what this meant: "The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, 'Why is this happening to me?' So she went to inquire of the LORD" (Gen. 25:22).

In reply, the Lord informed her that the elder would serve the younger, contrary to tradition:

*Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger. (Gen. 25:23)*

The sale of the birthright. The fact that Jacob, the younger, was the Lord's chosen was soon confirmed. "The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:27-28).

When, on one occasion, Esau came in unusually hungry, he asked Jacob for some stew he was cooking. "He said to Jacob, 'Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!' (That is why he was also called Edom)" (Gen. 25:29-30). Edom means "red." "Jacob replied, 'First sell me your birthright'" (v. 31). Esau replied, "Look, I am about to die. What good is the birthright to me?" (v. 32). Esau sold his birthright and ate the lentil stew that Jacob supplied, thus despising his birthright (vv. 33-34).

Later Rebekah connived with Jacob to secure from Isaac the blessing that would normally go to the eldest son. To make the deception work, Rebekah had Jacob put on Esau's clothes and cover his hands and the smooth part of his neck with goatskins to simulate Esau's hairy skin (Gen. 27:15-17). Jacob went to see Isaac, succeeded in deceiving him, and thus received the blessing that Isaac intended for Esau: "May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness—an abundance of grain and new wine. May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your

mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed" (vv. 28-29). The blessing pronounced upon Jacob was in keeping with the fact that he would be of the chosen line. Esau, the elder, would serve Jacob, the younger.

The Abrahamic Covenant Confirmed to Isaac

God forbids Isaac to go down to Egypt. Like Abraham, his father, Isaac wanted to go down to Egypt, which was outside the Promised Land. To have done so would have exposed him to the same temptations and problems that Abraham faced when he went to Egypt. Isaac had already gone to the land of the Philistines to escape the famine that was in the Promised Land. It was there that the Lord appeared to Isaac. The Lord said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live" (Gen. 26:2).

The blessing of Abraham given to Isaac. In support of his command to stay in the land, the Lord blessed Isaac:

Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws. (Gen. 26:3-5)

In making this covenant with Isaac and selecting him to be in the line of the Redeemer, God ignored Ishmael even though he was older than Isaac. The redemptive process, as subsequent Scripture illustrates, is selective. The promises originally given to Abraham are here reiterated, including the major elements of a great posterity, ultimate possession of the land, and bringing blessing to all nations of the earth.

The Covenant Confirmed to Jacob

Jacob's conflict with Esau. "Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (Gen. 27:41).

Esau's antagonism toward Jacob made clear that he did not have confidence in God's promises. If God's blessing and prophecies concerning Jacob were to be fulfilled, Esau's plans to kill him would not be consummated. Rebekah, however, realized the problem and asked Isaac's permission for Jacob to return to her homeland so that he would avoid marrying a Canaanite woman (Gen. 27:46).

Isaac approved this plan and told Jacob to go to his mother's family to take a wife from the daughters of Laban, his mother's brother (Gen. 28:1-2). Isaac pronounced another blessing upon Jacob, "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing of Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham" (vv. 3-4). Rebekah, possibly because she had joined Jacob in deceiving Isaac, never saw Jacob, her favorite, again.

Jacob receives confirmation of the covenant. Starting out on his journey, Jacob reached a certain place and stopped for the night (Gen. 28:11). While asleep he had a dream in which God said to him:

I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. (vv. 13-15)

The main elements of the covenant with Abraham were here transferred to Jacob, including the fact that God would be the God of Jacob, giving him the land in which he was lying and promising a great posterity as well as bringing a blessing to the entire world. Jacob went to Haran, apparently with God's permission and blessing, for God promised to watch over him while he was gone and bring him back (Gen. 28:15). Haran was situated near the Euphrates, the boundary of the Promised Land to the north and east, and did not have the temptations found in Egypt. In response to the covenant, Jacob himself made a vow:

"If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God. This stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth" (vv. 20-22).

Jacob's posterity multiplied. Two chapters (Gen. 29-30) are devoted to the account of how Jacob married four wives and had many children. Because God had greatly multiplied not only Jacob's children but his flocks, enmity grew between Jacob and Laban's sons, the accusation being that Jacob had robbed Laban of his property. As a result, Jacob left Laban, as recorded in Genesis 31.

Jacob renamed Israel. On the way back home, Jacob realized that he would encounter Esau and sent a message ahead requesting his favor. The messengers returned, however, reporting that Esau was coming with four hundred men (Gen. 32:1-6). Because of Jacob's fear of Esau, he engaged in a special prayer to God asking for his protection and care (vv. 9-12). Hoping to placate Esau, Jacob sent ahead to him gifts of goats, rams, camels, cows, bulls, and donkeys.

After sending his family across the ford of the Jabbok (Gen. 32:22), Jacob was left alone and wrestled with a man until daybreak. In the Hebrew there is a play on words as the word "Jabbok" is similar to Jacob and the word for wrestling is also similar to Jacob. Scripture does not reveal the character of this wrestling match between Jacob and his adversary, and it does not say that this is a theophany in angelic or human form. However, the wrestling is very real, and Jacob was not overcome until his assailant caused Jacob's hip to go out of joint (v. 25).

Jacob, however, was struggling because he needed a blessing from God. Jacob interpreted the encounter with the assailant as seeing God face to face (Gen. 32:30). God gave Jacob the name Israel (v. 28). Though the name Jacob had been given to him because he grasped Esau's heel at the time of birth, now he is called Israel, probably meaning, "He strives with God" (but see *ISBE*, 2:907).

After this important event in Jacob's life, he met Esau and was received in friendship (Gen. 33:4). Subsequent to his encounter with Esau, Jacob arrived at Shechem in Canaan, where he bought a small piece of ground. Jacob set up an altar there to

worship God (v. 20). In the several chapters in Genesis dedicated to recounting the story of Jacob, there was early confirmation of the fulfillment of the prophecy of a large posterity in the birth of Jacob's sons. The healing of the rift between Jacob and Esau that took place when Jacob returned permitted Jacob once again to dwell in the Promised Land as God himself had promised to provide.

The rest of the book of Genesis, a total of sixteen chapters, is devoted to the story of Jacob, his twelve sons, and their going down to Egypt. It is obvious that in a book where only two chapters are devoted to Creation and so many chapters to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God was emphasizing one of his central purposes—namely, to call and to bless Israel and through them to bring redemption and revelation of himself to the world.

The Prophecy Concerning Judah

Judah to be a prominent tribe. In Jacob's prophetic blessing upon his sons, the prophecy of Judah is far-reaching in its significance. The prophecy begins with a statement that Judah will triumph over his enemies and that even his father's sons will bow down to him: "Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?" (Gen. 49:8-9). The prophecy of Judah's numerous victories was fulfilled in the history of this predominant tribe. Judah along with Benjamin formed the kingdom of Judah in the divided kingdom.

The future King to come from Judah. Included in Jacob's prophecy was the prediction of a future King from Judah. This important prophecy about Judah concerns the scepter, the symbol of the kingdom: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his" (Gen. 49:10). As later Scripture supports, the line of David descended from the tribe of Judah, from which Christ the Messiah would come. The various rulers who would serve as kings, however, would culminate in the one who "comes to whom it belongs" (v. 10). This verse is translated in the NASB, "Until Shiloh comes." Instead of the formal name, "Shiloh," it is

better to translate the name "To whom it belongs," which refers to the Messiah as the ultimate One who has the right to rule. In other words, the scepter will remain with Judah until it is claimed by the final Ruler, who will be the Messiah, Jesus Christ, as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and the One who is entitled to sit on the throne of David. His reign will not be simply over the Davidic kingdom; the nations will also be obedient to him.

The Messiah to be blessed. The Messiah is described as reigning in a time of abundance: "He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk" (Gen. 49:11-12). What is described here is the abundance of the millennial kingdom where the vine will be so plentiful that a donkey will be tethered to it. Wine will be so abundant that it will affect the eyes, and the teeth will be affected by an abundance of milk. The poetic language speaks of the abundance that will be evident in the millennial kingdom (Isa. 61:6-7; 65:21-25; Zech. 3:10). The most important point in this prophecy is that the Messiah will come from the tribe of Judah.

Prophecy Concerning David

The Messiah to descend from David. The important point of the Davidic covenant is that the Messiah coming from Judah will descend through David. This is clearly revealed in the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:5-17). This covenant will be treated in greater detail later. The fact that the messianic genealogy will come through David is declared to David by Nathan the prophet: "The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom" (vv. 11-12). The facts of David's sure place in the lineage is clearly stated: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (v. 16).

The throne of David to continue forever. As indicated in the promise, David's line and his throne will continue forever (2 Sam. 7:16). The importance of this prophecy will be considered later under the treatment of the Davidic covenant. The

providence of God in selecting, maintaining, and fulfilling the line from Abraham to the Messiah becomes increasingly clear as the Old Testament unfolds. The Messiah would be a son of Abraham, of the house of Jacob, of the tribe of Judah, and of the family of David.

The Genealogies of Joseph and Mary Fulfilling Prophecy

The genealogical line of Solomon to Joseph. The genealogies listed in Matthew and Luke bring out the distinctive genealogy of Joseph as contrasted with the genealogy of Mary. In keeping with the Gospel of Matthew, the validity of Christ's claim to be the Son of David and the rightful King and Messiah is supported by the genealogy from David to Joseph that is provided. This genealogy comes from Abraham to David and then through Solomon to Joseph. The purpose of this genealogy is to determine the legitimacy and legality of Christ's claim to be the promised messianic King. The genealogy of Mary, descendant of Nathan, a son of David, provides the physical link with David.

Some unusual features characterize these genealogies. The Gospel of Matthew contains only fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the Captivity, and fourteen generations from the Captivity to Christ. The genealogy is not intended to be complete, for there are notable omissions, such as that of Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah, and kings mentioned in 1 Chronicles 3:11-12. In Matthew 1:13-15, which records the genealogy from Zerubbabel to Joseph, names are mentioned that are not found in the Old Testament.

The two genealogies separate. When the genealogy of Matthew is compared with that of Luke, it is clear that the two genealogies are entirely separate. In Luke 3:23-38 the genealogy is traced to Adam. Many believe that there are some omissions, as was common in genealogies of this kind. For instance, in Genesis 11:12 Cainan was omitted; however his name is recorded in Luke 3:36. In the genealogies of the priesthood in Ezra 7:1-5, six generations were omitted. The point of the genealogies is not so much to trace every individual involved but to provide a genuine lineage from the past to the present. The careful examination of Luke's genealogy indicates that it is the genealogy of Mary rather than of Joseph. The important difference in the genealogy appears, however, be-

tween the genealogies of David to Joseph and to Mary. The preceding genealogies are the same. The genealogy of Mary in Luke traces the lineage of Christ through Nathan, the son of David, rather than through Solomon (Luke 3:31). A question naturally arises concerning this difference in genealogies.

The curse upon the line of Jehoiachin. In the history of the apostasy preceding the Babylonian captivity, a solemn curse was put upon Jehoiachin (also called Coniah): "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah" (Jer. 22:30). Actually, Jehoiachin had children, but they did not survive him on the throne.

In Jeremiah 36, which records the delivery of Jeremiah's scroll to Jehoiakim, a further prophecy was given condemning this line. Jehoiakim was actually the father of Jehoiachin, but the account of Jeremiah's scroll being presented to the king and destroyed appears later in Jeremiah 36. When the king ordered the scroll cut and burned, the pronouncement was made:

Therefore, this is what the LORD says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on the throne of David; his body will be thrown out and exposed to the heat by day and the frost by night. I will punish him and his children and his attendants for their wickedness; I will bring on them and those living in Jerusalem and the people of Judah every disaster I pronounced against them, because they have not listened. (vv. 30-31)

Actually Jehoiachin, his son, reigned on the throne for a brief period, but he did not have a permanent reign.

The important point of this prophecy is that no descendant of Jehoiakim or Jehoiachin would be able to fulfill the messianic promise of sitting on the throne of David.

Matthew's genealogy traces the line of David through Solomon and through Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin, and no actual descendant of this line could occupy the throne of David. Matthew recorded this genealogy to show the legitimacy of the throne passing through Joseph, the legal heir of David, but actually, Jesus Christ had to come from a different line in the flesh through another son of David, Nathan. This leads to Mary, the actual mother of Christ. Accordingly, while the legal title passed to Christ through Joseph, the physical claim of being a

descendant of David comes through David and Nathan instead of David and Solomon.

This line of truth also tends to confirm the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ, for if Christ were the son of Joseph, he would not be able to sit on the throne of David in view of the curse put on that line. When the full prophecy is brought into view concerning Mary and the line from Nathan, it brings out beautifully the fact that the details of prophecy were literally fulfilled, requiring the lineage of David through Nathan to Mary instead of the cursed line of David through Solomon to Joseph. The modern tendency to gloss over the details of prophecy and arrive only at general conclusions is unfortunate in the light of the detailed study of the prophetic Word. Prophecy is found to be literal and intended for literal fulfillment.

7

Prophecy of the Future of Israel As a Nation

For a Gentile believer of the twentieth century, prophecy concerning the future of Israel may seem unimportant. However, from a prophetic perspective, the future of Israel is very important. In fact, the prophecies about Israel form the background of understanding prophecy as a whole.

One of the main causes for current confusion in understanding prophecy is the failure to take Israel-related prophecies literally. Attempts to transfer the promises relating to Israel to the church have been a major obstacle to understanding God's prophetic purposes as a whole. Once prophecies about Israel are distinguished from prophecies concerning the church or the Gentiles, the main programs of God as outlined in prophecy begin to be clear.

We can see from the analysis of Old Testament prophecy in the preceding chapters that a pattern of literal fulfillment has been established. The promise to Adam and Eve of death for disobedience was literally fulfilled. The promise of salvation,

first revealed to Adam and Eve, has also unfolded in history and had its climax in the death and resurrection of Christ. The predictions of the Flood and the covenant with Noah also came to dramatic and literal fulfillment. The Abrahamic covenant, in its broad provisions as originally outlined to Abraham, has, in general, already been completely fulfilled in that Abraham became a great man who had many descendants. The line of the Messiah leading to Mary has unfolded. In all of these predictions and their fulfillment, the principle of literal fulfillment of prophecy has been confirmed.

Though there is general recognition that many of the promises given to Abraham have had literal fulfillment, the question as to whether there is yet a future for Israel as a nation is a matter of dispute principally between the amillennial and the premillennial interpretation. The amillennial interpretation, which does not believe in a millennial reign after the second coming of Christ, tends to deny any future literal fulfillment, though the possibility of spiritual revival in Israel in the present age is sometimes recognized. In contrast, the premillennial interpretation pictures the second coming of Christ as bringing in a kingdom of glorious release and freedom for Israel, the seating of Christ on the throne of David, Israel's occupation of the Promised Land, and Israel as the object of God's special divine grace. Accordingly, the question as to whether Israel still has a future as a nation becomes an important aspect of the interpretation of the prophetic account.

The Promise of the Future of Israel as Fulfilled

Pattern of literal fulfillment. As brought out in previous studies, the prediction that from the line of Abraham would come One who would be a blessing to the entire world has already been fulfilled in Christ. Additional fulfillment is found in the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament as they contributed to the spiritual blessing God has bestowed on his people. The inspiration of the written Word of God is another aspect of the fulfillment of the promise of blessing. All of these factors detailing fulfilled prophecy in a literal fashion should be taken into consideration in determining whether there is a future promise to be fulfilled.

The emergence of the nation Israel. Throughout history it has become obvious that the descendants of Abraham have emerged

as a nation with millions of people. In Egypt the family of seventy may have become a people of two million or more at the time of the Exodus. Though for many generations they were persecuted and reduced in number, the people of Israel today are estimated to number from 15 to 25 million inhabitants in various parts of the world. The promise that Abraham would be a father of a great nation has been given factual support in Israel's current existence in the world.

The nation Israel recognized today. Though some extremists of one kind or another attempt to explain away any literal fulfillment of the existence of Israel today, the fact is that the world as a whole has recognized Israel as a political state and has assigned her certain territories in the Middle East. The people of Israel are very conscious of their lineage, their history, their religion, and their culture, and all of this combines to make the nation Israel what it is today. Up to the present time a literal fulfillment of the promises given to Abraham has been clearly confirmed by history.

Is a Future for the Nation Israel Certain?

The question of the future of Israel is important because it determines the interpretation of so many passages of the Bible. To some, the theological arguments may seem technical, but the question simply put is whether the prophecies about Israel should be taken in their plain and natural meaning as revealing Israel's future. The debate is between the amillennial view, which claims that there is no literal Millennium after the second coming of Christ, and the premillennial position, which believes Israel has a future Millennium after this event.

The objections of amillennialism. Even a casual examination of the evidence would indicate that inasmuch as the promises to Israel have been literally fulfilled up to the present time, a continuation of this progression of fulfillment in the future may be expected. However, the amillennial view of Scripture, which denies a future Millennium after the second coming of Christ, tends to interpret prophecy in a way which voids any literal fulfillment of a future for the nation Israel. Amillennial objections take many forms, but one of their main lines of argument is the statement that the Abrahamic covenant is conditional, that the conditions have not been met, and that therefore the Abrahamic covenant will not be fulfilled in the future.

It is true that Abraham was obedient to God when he left his homeland and went to a land that God would show him. It is also true that Abraham was obedient in a number of particulars in his walk with God. On the other hand, it is also true that he was out of the will of God when he went down into Egypt, when he suggested Eliezer as his heir, and when he wanted Ishmael as his heir. His partial unbelief in God's promises later turned to complete faith. The promises given to Abraham by their nature, however, could not be conditional in that God promised Abraham fulfillment *forever*, as is illustrated in the many promises and reiterations of the Abrahamic covenant.

It is true that partial fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant to any one generation and God's blessing on that generation were contingent on their obedience. The history of Israel reveals that they were frequently disobedient. In fact, Israel went down to Egypt in the time of Jacob when it was questionable whether they should have taken that step. It is also clear that, after their return to their land, they departed from God, a fact that resulted in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. When Israel rejected Christ, they were scattered all over the world in fulfillment of God's warning concerning disobedience.

The fact is, however, that in the midst of Israel's apostasy and sin, God gave them additional revelation concerning their future restoration. The prophet Jeremiah recorded that Israel would come back to their home after seventy years of captivity in Babylon (29:10). This was literally fulfilled, though Israel at the time was in apostasy and was spiritually unprepared to fulfill God's purpose. It is also true that through Jeremiah, in the midst of Israel's apostasy, God gave promises of Israel's ultimate blessing (see 23:5-8, a passage we will consider more at length later). Also through Jeremiah the new covenant, with its promise of ultimate blessing upon Israel, was given (31:10-14; this covenant will be considered more at length later). In other words, it is clear from Scripture that the certainty of the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy was such that even Israel's apostasy would not thwart God's ultimate purpose.

The fulfillment of the promise will be realized by those who are spiritually prepared to receive it—that is, by the godly remnant at the time of the second coming of Christ. The fact that there will be a godly remnant and that God will rescue them and place them in the millennial kingdom is a matter of specific prophecy, and the disobedience of Israel as a nation will not

deter God from fulfilling this prophecy in the future. In spite of these obvious evidences that there is a future for Israel, a number of objections are brought up by the amillenarian interpretation.

Amillenarians point to the judgment on Nineveh, which was predicted by Jonah but not inflicted because of their repentance, as evidence that blessing follows obedience. The answer to this, of course, is that this was not a covenant arrangement, and it is true that their deliverance for 150 years resulted from their repentance.

The judgment on Eli the priest for his sin is cited as evidence of an implied condition of obedience in connection with God's appointment of his line as the priestly line (1 Sam. 2:30; cf. Ex. 29:9; Jer. 18:1-18; Ezek. 3:18-19). But Eli lived under the conditional Mosaic covenant.

In these illustrations it is clear that blessing followed obedience and punishment followed disobedience, but in neither of these cases is there an ultimate promise in question. In connection with God's dealings with the nations, he was free to pluck up and cast down. He was also free to discipline any one generation of Israelites, as is illustrated many times in the Old Testament, but the continuing promise was made in spite of their apostasy and sin. When God proposed that he put aside the children of Israel and start over with Moses, there was immediate reference to the fact that God had a covenant with Israel (Ex. 32:13-14), and God did not bring this judgment on Israel.

In the Old Testament the rite of circumcision is cited as a condition for blessing. This related to the individual—that is, an uncircumcised Israelite was cut off from the covenant promise—but did not alter the promise to the nation.

Amillenarians use Esau as an illustration because he was excluded from some of the promises of blessing. This again is based on a misunderstanding. God's covenant with Abraham did not promise blessing on all his descendants but only on some; and in the extension of the Abrahamic covenant, Esau and Ishmael were expressly excluded, whereas the line of blessing went from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and on to the twelve sons of Jacob.

Sometimes amillenarians appeal to the obedience of Christ as the ultimate argument for their position. It clearly was necessary for Christ to go to the cross to provide grace in order to fulfill the promises given to Israel, but this very argument works against

the amillennial contention because the final restoration of Israel does not rest on their obedience but on the grace of God. A nation that does not deserve God's blessings will receive them, much as Christians, who do not deserve God's blessings because of their imperfections, are showered with his blessings in both time and eternity.

Amillenarians offer other objections besides the conditional nature of the promises. Some amillenarians point to partial fulfillment of the promises as sufficient to answer the problem. The development of Israel into a large nation, of course, was a partial fulfillment of the promise, but this was not what the promise required, since God promised Israel blessings that would continue for eternity.

Some amillenarians hold that the promise of the land was fulfilled in the time of Solomon, but this does not explain the many references in the Major and Minor Prophets to the land as subject to yet future fulfillment. Even in Solomon's day the land was not completely possessed though much of it was put under tribute.

Accordingly, the amillennial arguments, though numerous, are based on the insupportable premise that all the promises of God are conditional or have already been fulfilled. If the promises are conditional, there would be no sure fulfillment of any prophecy, because there are always uncertainties and contingencies involved. The ultimate question is "What has God promised?" If he has predicted a future event, then there should be no question concerning its future fulfillment.

Support for the unconditional character of the Abrahamic covenant. In denial of the concept that God's covenant with Abraham is conditional, a number of reasons can be cited as support for the concept of absolute certainty of the fulfillment of God's covenants.

All agree that the Mosaic covenant was conditional—that is, its blessings were conditioned on obedience, and its judgments would follow disobedience. But the other covenants of Israel, such as the Abrahamic covenant, the Palestinian covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the new covenant, are unconditional as far as their ultimate fulfillment is concerned, even though the blessings of the covenant in any given generation may be sacrificed by disobedience. When the Abrahamic covenant is repeated in passages subsequent to its original revelation, it is

declared to be eternal and, therefore, necessarily unconditional (Gen. 17:7, 13, 19; 1 Chron. 16:16–17; Ps. 105:9–10).

Likewise, the Palestinian covenant is everlasting in its character (Ezek. 16:60), as are the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:13, 16, 19; 1 Chron. 17:12; 22:10; Isa. 55:3; Ezek. 37:25) and the new covenant, which relates to Israel's future (Isa. 61:8; Jer. 32:40; 50:5; Heb. 13:20). In the nature of an eternal promise, conditions would be irrelevant, because the promise could not be eternal if contingent on obedience.

The Abrahamic covenant was subject to repetition and enlargement in subsequent Scriptures, but in none of these were the promised blessings conditioned on obedience.

The Abrahamic covenant, particularly the promise of the land (to be treated later), was solemnly confirmed by the shedding of blood (Gen. 15:7–21; Jer. 34:18). The geographic boundaries of the land were stated in Genesis 15:18–21. These promises were given at a time when Abraham was approaching God in unbelief, and it was to sustain and support what faith Abraham had that the covenant was solemnly confirmed.

The fact that circumcision was required of individuals who wanted to claim blessing under the Abrahamic covenant does not change its unconditional character. It is clear that individuals who were not circumcised were excluded from the promise. But this did not alter the fact that the promise would be fulfilled to the nation as a whole. Circumcision was a physical sign that they belonged under the covenant blessing (Gen. 17:9–14).

It is important to realize that when the covenant of Abraham was repeated to Isaac and Jacob, no conditions were mentioned. In fact, God's covenant with Isaac came at a time when he was trying to leave the land and was used as a deterrent to keep him in the Promised Land (Gen. 26:2–5). Likewise, the covenant was confirmed with Jacob as he was running away from home because of Esau (27:41–43). He also received the covenant promise without conditions (28:13–15).

As previously pointed out, even in the apostasy of Jeremiah's day, the eternal promises were not conditioned, and Jeremiah, in the midst of the apostate generation in which he lived, was given the revelation of the certain future of Israel (cf. Jer. 23:5–8; 30:5–11).

One of the most determinative passages on the unconditional character of the Abrahamic covenant is found in Hebrews 6:13–18:

When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

In this passage God's promise to Abraham is declared to be immutable and unchangeable. His purpose is declared to be "unchanging" (v. 17). This passage is especially significant in view of the fact that the religious leaders of Israel had rejected Christ and caused his crucifixion. In spite of this fact, the book of Hebrews points out that Israel has a certain and unchangeable promise of the fulfillment of the covenant. (See chapter 8.)

Many amillenarians, having abandoned the idea that the Abrahamic covenant is conditional, now favor interpreting it nonliterally. One approach is to regard Abraham's descendants, whether Israelites or other nations, as representing the church and thereby wiping out the necessity of a future for Israel.

The literal land, literal physical descendants, literal kings, and, ultimately, a literal Messiah combine to support a literal interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant. The Old Testament consistently supports a literal interpretation of the covenant, and the New Testament adds its confirming word, including the prophecy of a millennial kingdom following the Second Coming. The variety of solutions offered by the amillenarians themselves is evidence that none of their solutions really solve their problem of denying a future Millennium and a future for the nation Israel.

The Meaning of the Name Israel

The term Israel as used in the Scriptures. One way to avoid the conclusion that the Abrahamic covenant is subject to future literal fulfillment involving a future for the nation Israel is to redefine the term *Israel* so that it includes the church, thus considering the promises to Israel unliteral. Some amillenarians

use this approach, claiming that Israel does not have a future because her future will be fulfilled by the church composed of Jews and Gentiles.

This raises a question as to how the term *Israel* is used in the Bible itself. The terms *Israel* and *Israelite* are found approximately 2300 times in the Old Testament, and in every case they refer to those racially descended from Jacob. In the New Testament Israel is mentioned approximately 75 times. Also, Israel is referred to as *the Jews* 80 times in the Old Testament and about 170 times in the New Testament. In all of these many references, only one or two passages leave any question concerning the reference to the twelve tribes of Israel. Obviously, the burden of proof would be on anyone who suggests that the term *Israel* includes Gentiles, though it has been characteristic of amillennialism to affirm dogmatically that Israel is a synonym for the church in the present age. In the last generation, even among amillenarians, there has been a trend away from this doctrine for a number of reasons.

One of the problems faced by those who want to make the church and Israel synonymous is that though there are many promises of blessing for Israel, there are also threats of cursing, and this complicates the identification of the two. Usually amillenarians, who hold that the church is Israel, claim only the blessings. Other problems arise because of the sheer weight of the hundreds of references to Israel that obviously do not include the church. Also in Scripture Israel is constantly contrasted with other entities.

Israel contrasted with the Gentiles. In the New Testament as in the Old there are numerous messages addressed to Israel, and this continues after the institution of the church in Acts 2 (cf. Acts 3:12; 4:8, 10; 5:21, 31, 35; 21:28; et al.). In these references it is obvious that only those who are racially Israelites are included. The same is true of Paul's prayer for Israel's salvation (Rom. 10:1), which he bases on the fact that he also is an Israelite.

The use of the term *Jew* beginning in the Old Testament in the book of Esther and continuing in the New Testament, clearly describes those who are Israelites and not Gentiles. This is made obvious in the distinction of 1 Corinthians 10:32, where the threefold division of the human race into (1) Gentiles, (2) Jews, and (3) the church of God makes clear that these three separate divisions continue in the present age.

In Paul's discussion of Israel's situation in his day, he points out that the Israelites have many particular privileges (Rom. 9:4-5), none of which pertain to the church. Paul's fervent prayer for Israel (vv. 2-3) is another instance of the term *Israel*, referring to twelve tribes and not to Gentiles.

The New Testament also points out that while the Jews had certain privileges, Gentiles were excluded from them, as in Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:12: "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world." This and other passages clearly distinguish Israel from the Gentiles.

The church contrasted with unsaved Israel. Amillenarians agree that Scripture distinguishes Israel from the church, because unsaved Israelites are obviously not part of the church. If natural Israel, including the unsaved, exists apart from the church, it is impossible to transfer promises given to the nation Israel to the church, which is composed of those who are saved in the present age.

In continuance of this contrast, the New Testament speaks of a future program for Israel as distinct from God's program for the church. In the classic passage in Romans 9-11, where the apostle is tracing Israel's relationship to what he has previously discussed in the book of Romans, he raises the specific question as to whether God has cast off the nation of Israel: "I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew" (11:1-2). God has a program for Israel that goes beyond his program in the present age for Israel as a part of the church.

Paul recognized the present lost state of many in Israel. As a nation Israel has turned from God and is not operating under God's blessing. This is illustrated in the olive tree with the natural branches, referring to Israel, broken off, and Gentiles, represented by a wild olive shoot, grafted in (Rom. 11:17). Paul warns Gentiles as a group, however, that God has a future for Israel nationally and that "all Israel will be saved" (v. 26). By this he means, not that every individual will be saved spiritually, but that Israel as a nation will be delivered when the Deliverer comes from Zion, referring to the second coming of Christ (v. 26). These promises, developed so fully in Romans 11, will be treated later. Sufficient for the present study are the

facts that the nation of Israel and the church are contrasted and that the nation of Israel has a future.

The Scriptures also contrast spiritual Israel with Gentile Christian believers. Here the question as to whether Gentile Christians are designated as Israelites is faced squarely. Some amillenarians teach that the church takes the place of Israel completely and that both Gentiles and Israelites fulfill the promises originally given to Israel.

Of the hundreds of passages referring to Israel and to the Jews, only two or three could possibly be interpreted as confusing the Gentiles and Israel.

According to Romans 9:6, "It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." What is being contrasted here is the difference between those in Israel who are spiritual, or believers, and those who are only natural, that is, descendants of Jacob but not believers. In each generation Israelites who are believers inherit the promises. Gentile believers are not in view.

As has been pointed out, the promises given to Abraham concerning the nation Israel are narrowed to Isaac, not Ishmael, and to Jacob, not Esau, and to the twelve sons of Jacob. Only descendants of Jacob inherit the the broad promises of God relating to the nation. Among the descendants of Jacob, however, some are true believers and inherit the spiritual promises as well as the national promises. This is what Paul refers to as the election of grace (Rom. 11:5-10). In the present age Israelites who are saved become part of the church, but unbelieving Israelites are lost and are declared to be blinded.

In Romans 9:25 Paul quotes Hosea 2:23, "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one." This passage has been cited as an instance where Israel and the church are viewed together and Gentiles and Jews are considered as one people. The Hosea passage, however, is contrasting Israelites who are not the Lord's people, because of their lack of faith, with those who are true Israelites who believe in God. In the Hebrew of Hosea 2:23 there is a play on words where "Not my loved one" is a translation of the Hebrew *Lo-Ruhamah* and is contrasted with "Not my people," which is a translation of the Hebrew *Lo-Ammi*. This is quoted in Romans, not to merge the Gentiles and Israel, but to serve as an application. Just as God would bless some in Israel who, before they believed in Christ, were not of

true Israel, so God would bless Gentiles who were not formerly saved. It is a matter of application rather than interpretation, and there is no reason here to confuse Gentiles with Israel. However, God does deal with them in a similar way in this passage. Both Israelites who believe and Israelites who do not believe are genuine descendants of Jacob, but only those who believe are saved. And the racial distinction between Jew and Gentile is observed.

Amillennarians also cite Galatians 6:15–16 as evidence that the church can be viewed as Israel: “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.” The NIV translation, however, is questionable, since the word *even* is a translation of the Greek *kai*, which normally means “and.” A more accurate translation is, “and upon the Israel of God,” as in the NASB, ASV, KJV, NKJV, and NRSV. What Paul is saying is that he wishes peace and mercy upon all who are believers but especially upon the Israel of God—that is, Israelites who are saved. Though the NIV translation may have pleased amillennial scholars, a grammatically correct translation would preserve the distinction between Israel and Gentiles, in keeping with dispensational and premillennial teaching.

If the passages in Romans 9 and Galatians 6 are considered in light of hundreds of passages where the word *Israel* is distinctly a reference to the descendants of Jacob, the overwhelming evidence is in favor of maintaining this distinction. Even if the amillennial interpretation is upheld, it still does not generate a broad principle that any promise given to Israel can be claimed by the church or that the promises given to Israel are canceled. Even amillennarians tend to avoid this conclusion in current literature.

Have the promises to the nation Israel been canceled? It should be clear from the historical evidence that, up to the present, God has faithfully kept his promises to Israel. Israel is still a great nation and is still blessed by God. Through Israel the Messiah has come, and many of the blessings promised have already been fulfilled. The question that remains is whether there is any scriptural evidence that Israel has been cast aside.

As pointed out briefly, the evidence of Romans 11 is to the contrary, where Paul promises a future for Israel as a nation. A few passages, however, should be considered as possibly teaching that Israel has been cast aside. In Matthew 21:43,

referring to the rejection of Christ by his generation, Christ said, “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.” What is meant by the principal terms “kingdom of God” and “a people who will produce its fruit”? Matthew mainly uses the term “kingdom of heaven,” but here is one of the few references to the “kingdom of God.” In Matthew as well as other New Testament writings, the kingdom of God always refers to holy angels or people who are saved. The program of salvation, therefore, will be taken away from those who reject Christ as the Capstone.

But who are the people who are referred to as not producing fruit? Some are the scribes and Pharisees who would never be saved as long as they persisted in their unbelief. Since the early church was predominantly Jewish, this passage cannot be interpreted as taking the kingdom of God away from Israel. It is also clear that the kingdom of God did not refer to the millennial kingdom. Taking all factors into consideration, what Jesus is saying is that those who reject the King will have the kingdom of God taken away from them and given to any people who produce its fruit—both Jews and Gentiles. This is exactly what has happened in the church; both Jews and Gentiles who are saved become a part of the kingdom of God. In any case, it is clear that the Gentiles as a whole do not inherit the kingdom of God any more than unbelieving Israel does in the present age.

Another passage amillennarians use to try to justify the idea that Israel as a nation has been cast aside forever and its promises nullified is found in Romans 11:1–32, a passage already dealt with in part. However, as the opening verses of this chapter indicate, when Paul poses this question, “Did God reject his people?” his emphatic answer is, “By no means!” (Rom. 11:1). As the chapter unfolds, the answer is that God has not rejected his people because he has a present purpose for them—becoming members of the body of Christ through faith in Christ—and a future for them when the present age is over and deliverance, the second coming of Christ, occurs.

On the basis of the evidence, Scripture supports the conclusion that Israel has a great future as a nation. The details of this future will be considered in later chapters.

The return of millions of Jews to the land of Israel in the twentieth century has focused the attention of the world on this tiny land. Does the Jew have any hope of ever having peace and

tranquillity in his ancient land? After all, does it belong to the Arab world or to Israel? Several wars and the extension of Israel to the west bank of Jordan have caused continual tension between Israel's claim on the land and Arab resistance to her expansion. From a theological point of view, the return of Jews to Israel has again raised the question of Israel's future. Many church scholars have held that Israel has no future as a nation, and for many years they predicted that Israel would never go back to her land.

The return of Jews to Israel has renewed the study of what the Bible promises Israel in regard to the future. Many have concluded that the Word of God promises Israel ultimate possession, and if she is already possessing a portion of her land, it raises the questions of whether the prophecies about the end of the present age are about to be fulfilled and whether the second coming of Christ may be near.

8

The Promised Land

One of the important aspects of the Abrahamic covenant was the promise of possession of the land. God had said to Abraham, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Gen. 12:1). Upon Abraham's arrival in the Promised Land, God repeated this promise: "To your offspring I will give this land" (v. 7).

Various Interpretations of the Promise

Simple as the promise is, the interpretation of this promise has been a watershed in biblical prophecy. Questions have been raised as to whether this promise of the land was unequivocal or unconditional and as to whether the fulfillment would be literal.

Amillennial and postmillennial interpretations. Because a literal fulfillment of the promise would require occupation of the land after the Second Coming, amillenarians and postmillenarians, in keeping with their general interpretation of proph-

ecy, must find some way to avoid a literal interpretation of this promise. Two broad approaches have been adopted.

First, the most common amillennial and postmillennial approach today is to hold that the promise is not a promise of literal land but rather a promise of heaven. Because the Old Testament never has that form of interpretation, appeal is made to Hebrews 11:9–10, where it is said concerning Abraham: "By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." The reference to the city is commonly interpreted as meaning the New Jerusalem in eternity future. Undoubtedly, Abraham did have such an eternal hope though this is not stated in detail in Genesis. This does not, however, affect the promise of the land, which was to be fulfilled in time and not in eternity according to a literal interpretation. Abraham had hope both for the possession of the land in the Millennium and for residence in the New Jerusalem in eternity.

In searching for evidence in support of a nonliteral interpretation of the promise, one soon becomes aware that the Old Testament in its many repetitions of the promise always implies that it is a literal promise and offers hope of literal fulfillment. Accordingly, some amillenarians and postmillenarians have adopted a second point of view—namely, that the promise is literal; Israel was promised literal possession of the land, but it is a conditional promise that will never be fulfilled because of Israel's disobedience.

There is a measure of truth in this approach, because Moses and later prophets warned the children of Israel that if they did not obey God, they would be driven out of the land. This was fulfilled in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities as well as in the worldwide dispersion of A.D. 70. Old Testament prophecy, however, goes on to explain that though Israelites were being dispersed and scattered, they would be regathered and brought into their Promised Land. This will become evident as we consider later repetitions of this promise in the Old Testament.

The basic error in this amillennial approach is a failure to comprehend that just as the church is saved by the grace of God, so Israel will be regathered and restored by the grace of God, and it does not depend upon human faithfulness. Israel does not deserve to be restored and given the land, but God's initial

promise to Abraham was gracious and unconditional. Though the people of Israel were dispersed from the land, they were also promised that they would be regathered from all over the world.

The premillennial interpretation. Those who find evidence in Scripture for a kingdom on earth after the second coming of Christ, in keeping with premillennial interpretation, can take this promise literally. That is, Israel will actually be given her Promised Land in the period following the second coming of Christ when Christ will reign on earth. This interpretation is confirmed throughout the Old Testament.

The premillennial interpretation is also in keeping with Abraham's understanding. In God's original instruction, he told Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldeans and go to the land that he would show Abraham. If the land were merely a type of heaven, Abraham could have remained in Ur of the Chaldeans and believed in his ultimate possession of a place in the New Jerusalem. However, the land became a very important factor in Abraham's understanding of the prophecy. Possession of the land was obviously linked to the question of whether Abraham would have an heir, and the fulfillment of the promise of his descendants is linked to the promise of the land.

Abraham was not only given the original promise but also had this promise confirmed repeatedly in later experiences in his life. In connection with Lot being separated from Abraham in Genesis 13, God told Abraham, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you" (vv. 14–17). It should be obvious that this promise to Abraham related to the physical land that he would actually see with his eyes, something that would never be true of the New Jerusalem in Abraham's lifetime. Further confirmation was given to Abraham when he began to question whether he would have literal offspring. In confirming the fact that he would have an heir, God said to Abraham, "'Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'" (15:5).

Later on the same day God confirmed his covenant with Abraham regarding the land in a solemn ceremony in which

blood was shed and the boundaries of the land were given, as stated in Genesis 15:18, "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.'" There follows a list of the heathen tribes that lived in that area at that time. Heaven is not described even allegorically as the area between the river of Egypt and the Euphrates. If a promise is interpreted nonliterally, there must be some correspondence between the promise and a nonliteral interpretation, and in this case the area was occupied by heathen tribes—certainly not typical of heaven.

Abraham had another confirmation of the promise at the time it was announced that Sarah would have a child. At that time God said, "The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God" (Gen. 17:8). The subsequent birth of Isaac (21:1–3) was no doubt considered by Abraham another confirmation not only of his promised descendants but also of the Promised Land. It is significant that those who uphold the amillennial and postmillennial point of view do not trace the promise through these various confirmations of the promise to Abraham because the emphasis is clearly on the literal fulfillment of the promise.

The Promise in Relation to Isaac and Jacob

The promise of the land given to Isaac. The birth of Isaac was a confirmation of God's purpose to give Abraham heirs. Isaac was also designated as the promised seed instead of Ishmael. Further confirmation is found in the fact that Isaac himself had the promise of the land repeated to him in Genesis 26 when God told him not to go down to Egypt:

Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws (vv. 3–5).

Throughout this promise there is repetition of reference to the land in which Isaac was living, the same land being promised to his descendants and his offspring. It is significant that the promise is related to Abraham's obedience, not to Isaac's, as the promise now becomes immutable and certain of fulfillment.

The promise in relation to Jacob. Just as Isaac was born in Abraham's old age, so Jacob and Esau were born when Isaac was sixty years old. Scripture is clear that Jacob, the younger of the twins, was selected to be the promised heir rather than Esau. Before their birth, Rebekah, questioning God about the presence of twins and was instructed by God:

*Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger. (Gen. 25:23)*

Because of the antagonism between Jacob and Esau stemming from Jacob's purchase of Esau's birthright, Rebekah sent Jacob back to her homeland, Haran, with instructions to seek a wife from her relatives.

On the journey to Haran God revealed himself to Jacob in a dream as recorded in Genesis 28:12–15:

He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: 'I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.'

God not only promised a posterity to Jacob, fulfilled in his twelve sons, but also that the rest of the covenant given to Abraham would be fulfilled in him—that is, he would have many descendants and would bring blessing to all peoples of the earth. In keeping with this, God repeated the promise of the land and pledged to bring Jacob back to it. A careful study of

these passages makes clear that the promise of the land was intrinsic to the whole covenant given to Abraham. Inasmuch as Abraham became a great man, had a great posterity, and brought blessing to the whole world through Christ, it is reasonable to assume that the rest of the Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled just as literally as these provisions. The nonliteral or conditional interpretation of these promises is not supported in Scripture.

The Promise of the Land

The departure of the children of Israel for Egypt. In anticipation of the fact that Israel would go down into Egypt and return, God had told Abraham, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions" (Gen. 15:13-14). The departure from the land and settlement in Egypt were accomplished when Joseph invited his family to come and dwell in Egypt during the famine. As the subsequent history of Israel demonstrates, they grew from a family of about seventy to a nation of two to three million in the four hundred years they were in Egypt.

In considering the question as to whether the promise of the land was literal, one must realize that the promise of going down into Egypt was literal, not spiritual. Israel did not simply depart from God spiritually; they physically left the land and went to Egypt. It is also significant that the promise of their return was literal. The book of Exodus and subsequent Scriptures record their departure from Egypt and their arrival in the Promised Land.

The physical exodus of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land is a subject of five major books of the Old Testament—Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua. All conservative interpreters of Scripture, whether amillennial, postmillennial, or premillennial, have to acknowledge that the prophecy of their departing from the Promised Land to a strange land and their literal return is a matter of history. It is also significant that Scripture devotes four books to this massive movement of more than two million individuals from one land to another. In the process, God miraculously worked on Israel's

behalf and gave them the foundation for the Mosaic Law that was to govern their lives until the time of Christ.

The call of Moses. The early chapters of the book of Exodus record the birth of Moses and the background of Israel's slavery in Egypt. Moses' providential rescue and adoption by Pharaoh's daughter and his thorough education in the king's palace were to prepare him to be the leader of Israel as well as the writer of the Pentateuch. After fleeing Egypt, Moses resided in the desert for forty years, and while there he received the call at the burning bush to return to Israel. Though a reluctant leader, he was aided by his brother Aaron in his contest with Pharaoh.

The plagues of Egypt. The background of Israel's exodus from Egypt was a series of miraculous plagues which God inflicted upon the Egyptians before they were willing to let the children of Israel go. In the process, Moses' leadership and appointment by God were confirmed. After the tenth plague, Pharaoh allowed the children of Israel to leave.

The forty years in the wilderness. At the outset of their departure from Egypt, Israel experienced the miracle of deliverance through the Red Sea in which Pharaoh and his armies perished. Their faith was soon tested by the desert's lack of water and food, but God miraculously supplied them.

In the wilderness Israel received the Law of Moses which was to govern their lives for centuries. With it came the appointment of the priests, the construction of the tabernacle, and the system of sacrifices that characterized the Law. In spite of the many evidences of a supernatural God caring for them when they came to Kadesh-Barnea, Israel made the fatal mistake of doubting God's ability to give them the land that he had promised. Once again, this emphasizes the importance of the land in God's program for Israel. When they sent out the twelve spies, only two, Joshua and Caleb, were willing to take the stand that God would give the people of Israel their Promised Land. Because of their unbelief, Israel was condemned to forty years of wandering in the wilderness, enduring the hardships of desert life. But they were miraculously sustained by manna from heaven and water out of the rock. Scripture records Israel's series of failures to trust God's promise to care for them in fulfillment of his pledge that they would return to the land.

In the book of Deuteronomy, where the major elements of the Law were rehearsed by Moses late in his life, God solemnly warned Israel how important it was to obey the law. If Israel did

obey the law, God would allow them to live in the land in the blessings which God would shower upon them, but if they did not, they would be driven out of the land.

The solemn words of Moses are the tragic prophecy of Israel's experience of dispersion from the land:

Just as it pleased the LORD to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess. Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods—gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, "If only it were evening!" and in the evening, "If only it were morning!"—because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see. (Deut. 28:63–67)

These verses were literally fulfilled as are many other promises in relation to the land. The point is made clearly in Scripture that though the ultimate possession of the land at the time of the second coming of Christ will certainly be fulfilled, the possession of the land by any one generation of Israel was dependent on the grace of God and the obedience of Israel to their law.

The possession of the land under Joshua. As the book of Joshua records, the children of Israel eventually crossed over the Jordan from the east bank and began the conquest of the Promised Land at Jericho. As God made plain to Joshua, he was operating on the basic Abrahamic promise of the land for Israel, but possession of it in his generation depended on his act of faith in possessing it.

God told Joshua, "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west. No one will be able to stand up against

you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Josh. 1:2–5).

God's promise to Joshua was literally fulfilled in his lifetime. Every portion of the land that Israel possessed was theirs. However, as the book of Joshua makes plain, they did not conquer all the Promised Land. Joshua 21:43–45 says: "So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. . . . Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled." Some have attempted to interpret this as complete fulfillment of what God had promised Abraham. However, this was not the case. The promise of possession was a promise of possession forever, which was not fulfilled in Joshua's case, since later the children of Israel once again were dispersed. The book of Judges makes plain that they still had to conquer much of the land. According to Judges 1:19, "The LORD was with the men of Judah. They took possession of the hill country, but they were unable to drive the people from the plains, because they had iron chariots." Judges 1:21 says, "The Benjamites, however, failed to dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the Benjamites."

According to Judges 1:27, "Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth Shan or Taanach or Dor or Ibleam or Megiddo and their surrounding settlements, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that land." The passage goes on to say that they "never drove them out completely" (v. 28). Likewise, the Canaanites in Gezer and the Canaanites in Kitron or Nahalol and many others as listed in Judges 1:29–36 remained in possession of portions of the Promised Land. Those who were left in the land became thorns in the side of Israel, and their altars and false gods became a snare to Israel (Judg. 2:1–3).

Seven Centuries of Partial Possession of the Land

Israel's problems in the period of the Judges. As the book of Judges records, Israel went through a series of apostasies and restorations, each time sinking lower than before. In the process, the promise of the land was not fulfilled.

In response to Israel's spiritual need, God raised up the prophet Samuel, who became the last of the judges and the first of the order of prophets, and through him Israel was led back to

some extent into the worship and service of God. At the close of Samuel's life, at God's instructions, Samuel anointed Saul and later David to be kings over Israel. Partially under Saul but extensively through David, more of the land was possessed than ever before, and David set up a glorious and wealthy kingdom.

Israel under Solomon. Under Solomon, the kingdom of Israel grew to an extent of wealth and recognition never achieved before or after. The extensive wealth and influence of Solomon is portrayed in Scripture (1 Kings 4:1-34; 2 Chron. 9:13-28). "He ruled over all the kings from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt" (2 Chron. 9:26). On the basis of this, some amillenarians hold that this fulfilled the promise of the land to Abraham—that is, that Solomon extended his kingdom over the entire area promised in Genesis 15:18-21. A careful reading of the text, however, makes clear that while Solomon put the entire area under his control in the sense that he demanded tribute from these countries, they were not actually incorporated into the state of Israel. This made their defection easy once Solomon died and the power of the kingdom began to decline. The extent to which the promises were fulfilled to Solomon also failed to fulfill the requirement that the land would be possessed forever, for Solomon's influence was limited to his reign. Further evidence is found for the fact that Solomon's reign did not fulfill the Abrahamic covenant in that many later prophecies picture a future fulfillment. In fact, the promise of the land in its ultimate fulfillment fails to find completion in the entire Old Testament. Hebrews 11 indicates concerning the men of faith, that they looked forward to fulfillment of God's plans and purposes but did not live to see their complete fulfillment.

Israel after Solomon. Following Solomon's reign, the kingdom of Israel was divided into the ten-tribe kingdom, Israel, and the two-tribe kingdom, Judah. Israel continued to depart from God. All of the kings of the ten-tribe kingdom were evil, and though there were occasional revivals in the two-tribe kingdom of Judah, the prophets had to repeat the warning that unless the people kept the law they would be driven out of the land.

The Second Dispersion of Israel

The warnings of the dispersion. Following the first dispersion of Israel, the journey of Jacob and his family to Egypt at the

invitation of Joseph, the prophets warned of a possible second dispersion. Moses had laid down the principle that obedience to the law was necessary for any one generation to possess the land (Deut. 28). Now in the time of Israel's apostasy, the prophets foretold the Assyrian captivity. The prophet Isaiah, who lived approximately 740-680 B.C., predicted the Assyrian captivity which took place in 722-721 B.C. Isaiah recorded:

The LORD spoke to me again: "Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore, the LORD is about to bring against them the mighty floodwaters of the River—the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it, and reaching up to the neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of your land, O Immanuel!" (8:6-8)

The Assyrian armies are pictured like the flood of the Euphrates overflowing its banks and sweeping through both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The warning was repeated in Isaiah 10:5-6: "Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets." In the midst of this prophecy of Israel's being conquered and led into captivity by the Assyrians, God gave a promise of their return (vv. 20-27). He declared, "A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God" (v. 21). Here again we have the familiar prophecies of leaving the land and coming back to the land, both of which were literally fulfilled in the Old Testament period.

The prophet Jeremiah, who lived in the seventh century B.C., prophesied that Babylon would conquer the two remaining tribes and carry them off into captivity. In a series of encounters, he clearly prophesied this in contradiction to the false prophets who told the king of Judah that Babylon would not conquer Israel. Jeremiah prophesied

Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him. All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then

many nations and great kings will subjugate him. If, however, any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, declares the LORD, until I destroy it by his hand. So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your interpreters of dreams, your mediums or your sorcerers who tell you, "You will not serve the king of Babylon." They prophesy lies to you that will only serve to remove you far from your lands; I will banish you and you will perish. But if any nation will bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let that nation remain in its own land to till it and to live there, declares the LORD. (27:6-11)

Fulfillment of the prophecy of dispersion. Jeremiah not only prophesied the coming of Babylon but also recorded the historic fulfillment as stated in Jeremiah 39:1-2: "This is how Jerusalem was taken: In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army and laid siege to it. And on the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year, the city wall was broken through." The chapter records the tragic capture of Zedekiah, the killing of his sons before his eyes, and his being blinded and taken to Babylon (39:5-7). Jeremiah also recorded the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the palace (vv. 8-10). This occurred in 605 B.C.

Later a large contingent of Israelites was taken into captivity in 597 B.C., and ultimately the temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. (2 Chron. 36:14-21). The leaders of Israel for the most part were killed, the articles of the temple were carried off to Babylon, and the temple itself and the wall of Jerusalem were destroyed along with the palaces and everything of value. Second Chronicles closes by saying that the land would enjoy its sabbath rest denied to it by Israel for seventy years (36:21). It also records Cyrus's proclamation issued approximately 538 B.C., which allowed the children of Israel to return.

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing:

"This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

"The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up'" (36:22-23).

Once again we see the pattern of literal fulfillment. Just as Israel went literally into Egypt and came back literally, so she was carried off into the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, but the promise, as recorded in Scripture, was that she would be brought back once again to her ancient land. Regardless of eschatological viewpoint, all interpreters of the Bible have to agree that these promises were literally and graphically fulfilled.

The Third and Final Dispersion of Israel

Predicted in the Old Testament. Just as both Israel's first dispersion into Egypt and second dispersion into Assyria and Babylon were fulfilled with Israel's literal return to the Promised Land, so the Old Testament predicted a third and worldwide dispersion, the extent of which was never realized in Israel's earlier dispersions. As contained in the prophecy of Moses previously mentioned, God declared, "Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other" (Deut. 28:64). Prophecy goes on to describe the anxiety, persecution, and trouble Israel would face as they were scattered all over the world. This worldwide scattering was never fulfilled in the Old Testament, however, as in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities the dispersion was limited to these countries.

Predicted in the New Testament. Israel's ultimate dispersion was anticipated by Christ when he prophesied the destruction of the temple: "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (Matt. 24:2). Jesus described the destruction of Jerusalem preceding the third dispersion in graphic terms:

When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been

written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:20-24).

Third dispersion fulfilled. These prophecies, like other prophecies, were literally fulfilled, and the destruction of Jerusalem took place in A.D. 70 with terrible persecution and the killing of tens of thousands of Israelites. Jesus prophesied that the dispersion would be "to all the nations" (Luke 21:24). History has recorded the sad fulfillment.

Following A.D. 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem, Israel was driven out of the land, their cities destroyed, their orchards ruined, their wells filled with stones. Every effort was made to make the land unlivable, resulting in probably fewer than fifteen thousand Jews remaining in the land. The rest were scattered all over the world, a process that continued to the twentieth century. Even this dispersion, however, anticipated Israel's future regathering, for Jesus said, "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). As in the other dispersions, this dispersion over the entire world would eventually be ended and Israel would return to its land.

The Prophecy of the Final Regathering of Israel to the Promised Land

Amillennial objection to the future regathering of Israel. In previous discussion, the amillennial contention that the promise of the land was fulfilled in the time of Joshua, or later in the time of Solomon, has been considered and found untenable. Later prophecies anticipated a future fulfillment, so it is clear that the partial fulfillments, plainly indicated as partial in Scripture, did not fulfill the promise of the Abrahamic covenant.

One further reference is found in Nehemiah 1:8-9: "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'" The foundational fact that the covenant of the land

stems from the Abrahamic promise was repeated. Furthermore, we are told that God kept his promise.

There is no evidence in this passage that the entire area from Egypt to the Euphrates River was possessed by Israel at this time. The facts indeed are quite to the contrary. The most extensive possessions of Israel occurred in the reign of Solomon, but even they did not incorporate the entire area into the land of Israel.

As pointed out previously, however, all these references in the Old Testament fall short of one important requirement—that the land was to be given to Israel forever, and they were not to be dispersed from it again (Amos 9:13-15).

Because these arguments do not satisfy the Abrahamic covenant, most amillenarians are content to spiritualize the promise of the land and make it equivalent to heaven or to the spiritual blessings believers in Christ enjoy. This conclusion, however, is likewise without scriptural confirmation, as the land is never mentioned as meaning this in the entire Old Testament. The New Testament also, though it extends the eternal hope of being in the New Jerusalem forever, does not include fulfillment of the promise of the land as given to Abraham. Instead, the promises of the regathering from the third dispersion, if taken literally, make clear that they are subject to future fulfillment.

Promises in Isaiah of a future regathering of Israel. The promises of a future regathering of Israel are imbedded in the promises of a future reign of the Messiah on earth. These promises are found in so many passages that it is amazing that efforts have been made to ignore or explain away these prophecies.

In the description of the messianic kingdom in Isaiah 11:1-12, Isaiah declared:

In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea. He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth. (vv. 11-12)

Inasmuch as the glorious kingdom described in this chapter is future, so the regathering of Israel is future.

Isaiah said further, "The LORD will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land" (14:1). Isaiah 27:13 records the prophecy that "those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem."

In 43:5-7 Isaiah recorded this word from God: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." Note that this implies worldwide regathering, which could only follow A.D. 70 when worldwide dispersion took place. Isaiah described in chapter 60 the glorious kingdom reign of Christ: "Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever" (v. 21). The missing ingredient in the regatherings from the first and second dispersions was Israel's possession of the land forever. This will be fulfilled in their third and final regathering. The regathering of Israel "from all the nations" is mentioned again in Isaiah 66:20.

Promise in Jeremiah of future regathering. The prophet Jeremiah, living a century later than Isaiah, during the apostasy of the kings of Judah frequently referred to the regathering of Israel. This emphasizes an important point in the doctrine that the people of Israel would return to their land—namely, that they would return to the land not because they deserved it but because they are the recipients of God's grace. Even in their apostasy God reminded them that they would be regathered:

"However, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when men will no longer say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' but they will say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' For I will restore them to the land I gave their forefathers. But now I will send for many fishermen," declares the LORD, "and they will catch them. After that I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down on every mountain and hill and from the crevices of the rocks" (16:14-16).

This passage brings out emphatically that the regathering will be from all countries and that it will be complete; every Israelite will be brought back to his ancient land. According to Ezekiel 20:33-38, the unbelievers will be purged out, but the godly remnant of Israel will be allowed to enter the Promised Land. This promise, obviously, has never been fulfilled to the present hour. In the first dispersion all of the children of Israel left Egypt, but it is questionable whether those who went to Assyria and Babylon in the second dispersion all came back. In the final regathering, however, every Israelite will be brought back to his ancient land.

One of the most comprehensive prophecies concerning Israel's regathering in connection with the future reign of Christ on earth is found in Jeremiah 23:5-8:

*"The days are coming," declares the LORD,
"when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch,
a King who will reign wisely
and do what is just and right in the land.
In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live in safety.
This is the name by which he will be called:
The LORD Our Righteousness.*

"So then, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when people will no longer say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' but they will say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' Then they will live in their own land."

In this passage the final regathering of Israel is in connection with the reign of Christ on earth, a time when the kingdoms of Judah and Israel will be brought back together. The regathering of Israel is going to be in contrast to the regathering from Egypt and will be "out of all countries where [the LORD] had banished them" (Jer. 23:8). This, of course, has not yet been fulfilled and requires literal fulfillment in the future.

Another comprehensive statement of this regathering of Israel is found in Jeremiah 30:8-11, following a passage dealing with the Great Tribulation (vv. 5-7), from which time of trouble

Jacob will be saved. God promises to deliver Israel from their oppressors:

*"In that day," declares the LORD Almighty,
"I will break the yoke off their necks
and will tear off their bonds;
no longer will foreigners enslave them.
Instead, they will serve the LORD their God
and David their king,
whom I will raise up for them.*

*"So do not fear, O Jacob my servant;
do not be dismayed, O Israel,"
declares the LORD.
"I will surely save you out of a distant place,
your descendants from the land of their exile.
Jacob will again have peace and security,
and no one will make him afraid.
I am with you and will save you,"
declares the LORD.*

*"Though I completely destroy all the nations
among which I scatter you,
I will not completely destroy you.
I will discipline you but only with justice;
I will not let you go entirely unpunished."*
(Jer. 30:8-11)

The regathering is in keeping with God's purpose not to destroy Israel but to preserve Israel forever. Jeremiah 31:10-14, another extended passage, speaks of bringing Israel back to her ancient land.

The time of Israel's regathering will involve the fulfillment of the new covenant for Israel (Jer. 31:31-37), which will be treated separately later in chapter 17.

The time of Israel's regathering will occur when Jerusalem will be rebuilt, according to Jeremiah 31:38-40:

*"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when this city
will be rebuilt for me from the Tower of Hananel to the
Corner Gate. The measuring line will stretch from there
straight to the hill of Gareb and then turn to Goah. The
whole valley where dead bodies and ashes are thrown, and*

*all the terraces out to the Kidron Valley on the east as far as
the corner of the Horse Gate, will be holy to the LORD. The
city will never again be uprooted or demolished."*

It is of great significance that the portion of the city described here throughout Israel's ancient history was a place for a garbage heap and dead bodies. Only in the twentieth century was this area of Jerusalem repossessed by Israel and transformed from a garbage heap into an area where beautiful apartments have been built. Accordingly, the fulfillment of this promise, inasmuch as it involves twentieth-century events, also points to a future regathering of Israel. Further, note the important statement, "The city will never again be uprooted or demolished" (Jer. 31:40). It is a remarkable promise that indicates that time is running out for the present age and that the future restoration of Israel is impending. In view of the many times that Jerusalem has been destroyed and rebuilt, this promise stands out.

Still another comprehensive prophecy of Israel's regathering is found in Jeremiah 32:37-44:

*"I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish
them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them
back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be
my people, and I will be their God. I will give them
singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear
me for their own good and the good of their children after
them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will
never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to
fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. I will
rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in
this land with all my heart and soul.*

*"This is what the LORD says: As I have brought all this
great calamity on this people, so I will give them all the
prosperity I have promised them. Once more fields will be
bought in this land of which you say, 'It is a desolate waste,
without men or animals, for it has been handed over to the
Babylonians.' Fields will be bought for silver, and deeds
will be signed, sealed and witnessed in the territory of
Benjamin, in the villages around Jerusalem, in the towns of
Judah and in the towns of the hill country, of the western
foothills and of the Negev, because I will restore their
fortunes, declares the LORD."*

Here are all the familiar promises that have preceded—namely, that they would be gathered “from all the lands where [God] banish[es] them” (v. 37). When they came back they would “live in safety” (v. 37). God’s goodness and grace to them will never stop (v. 40). In the context of the other quotations from Jeremiah, it is clear that this refers to the final regathering.

Prophecies in Ezekiel of future regathering. Ezekiel added his confirming word concerning Israel’s future. After describing the purging judgment on Israel in which rebels would be prohibited from entering the land (20:33–38), Ezekiel quoted the Lord, “Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the land I had sworn with uplifted hand to give to your fathers” (v. 42).

In 34:13 Ezekiel recorded this word from the Lord: “I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land.”

In connection with Ezekiel’s promise of the restoration of the nation of Israel in the valley of dry bones, another promise of the regathering of Israel was given: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms” (37:21–22).

In connection with this promise, the Lord declared: “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever” (37:24–25).

The reference to David’s reigning over Israel clearly points to a future restoration of Israel and a future kingdom that has not yet been fulfilled. Though some have tried to spiritualize this promise to get away from its literalness, the passage clearly teaches that David will share with Christ as a co-regent and rule over the children of Israel in the millennial kingdom. This is confirmed also in Ezekiel 34:23–24: “I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will

tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.” While Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords will be King over the entire world as well as ruling over the house of Israel, David apparently will share the throne as far as the kingdom of Israel is concerned. Inasmuch as David will be resurrected before the millennial kingdom, this is plausible and provides a sensible explanation of this passage.

In 39:25–29 Ezekiel gave another remarkable promise concerning the extent of Israel’s regathering. First the Lord declared, “I will now bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous for my holy name” (v. 25). Then he stated further:

“When I have brought them back from the nations and have gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will show myself holy through them in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD.” (vv. 27–29)

The remarkable factor in this prophecy is not only that they will be gathered from all nations but that the Lord will “gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind” (v. 28). This same truth is brought out in Jeremiah 16:14–16. Because this was never fulfilled in any of the previous regatherings, it obviously refers to a third and future regathering in connection with the second coming of Christ.

It would seem redundant to deal with passage after passage referring to this future regathering if it were not for the fact that amillenarians deny a future regathering of Israel in spite of these many solid prophecies embedded in the context of the future kingdom on earth.

Promise in the Minor Prophets of future regathering. What was emphasized in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel is also found in the Minor Prophets. According to Hosea 3:4–5, “For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David

their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessing in the last days." Hosea, acknowledging that the throne of Israel would be vacant for many years and that sacrifices would cease, nevertheless reaffirmed that Israel would come back to God and to David their king, obviously a reference to the prophetic statement that David will share the throne of Christ in his future millennial kingdom. Joel added his word of prophecy on this subject after graphically describing the preceding judgments of God: "Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations. Their bloodguilt, which I have not pardoned, I will pardon" (3:20-21). Amos, after a long recounting of the sins of Israel and God's judgment upon them, nevertheless promised a day of restoration for Israel (9:11-15). He referred to this as a restoration of "David's fallen tent" (v. 11). He pictured the abundant crops of Israel in that day and then concluded: "I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God" (vv. 14-15).

The promised restoration of Israel will include rebuilding their ancient cities, planting vineyards, and making gardens. Some of these prophecies have current fulfillment. The final verse states plainly that Israel will be restored to its land and never again be driven out of it. Inasmuch as the first and second dispersions are to be followed by a third, this regathering is the final one that is a part of the kingdom promises given to Israel in connection with the second coming of Christ. As such, it is clear that this promise has not yet been fulfilled in any literal way.

To these promises of the future restoration of Israel to her land can be added that of Obadiah 17-21 that Israel will possess the land. Micah also gave a picture of this future kingdom (4:1-8). In this passage Israel is described as secure in peace and safety and enjoying her vines and fig trees. Her future restoration is related to the Abrahamic covenant (Mic. 7:20). Zephaniah added his chapter to Israel's future regathering to her ancient land (chap. 3). In Zechariah, the people of Israel are pictured returning from countries of the east and west (Zech. 8:7-8). In confirmation of this as a future kingdom promise, Jerusalem is described as the capital of the earth (v. 22). Zechariah 14 describes the second coming of Christ and the millennial

kingdom which follows. This would necessarily include the fulfillment of the promises of the land.

Important conclusions. Certain conclusions can be reached regarding the promises of the land to Israel as a whole. (1) It is obvious that Israel has not possessed the land permanently, having been dispersed after the two previous regatherings. (2) Based on clear promises from the prophets, Israel will be regathered from the third dispersion and be in her land during the millennial kingdom. (3) It is evident that the promises given to Israel will not be fulfilled by the church or by the Gentiles. (4) The promise must be fulfilled by the physical seed of Jacob, in keeping with the Abrahamic covenant. (5) Inasmuch as the promise of possession is an unending promise, it is obviously related to a future kingdom, since all the previous possessions have terminated in dispersions. If Israel is going to possess the land, the premillennial view of the Lord's return is correct.

The Davidic Covenant: The Future Davidic Kingdom

Along with many promises to Israel about the land are prophecies about the Davidic kingdom. Like the promises of the land, the promises of the kingdom have often been spiritualized or interpreted nonliterally, with attempts to find fulfillment in the present age. Once again the issue is whether prophecies should be interpreted literally. And this again raises the question of whether prophecies to Christians are to be fulfilled literally in the prophetic future.

Early Prophecies of the Future Kingdom

The kingdom promised to David is important because it explains the history of the past as well as prophesying the future. At stake is the question of whether there will be a future Davidic kingdom on earth following the second coming of Christ as taught by premillenarians.

Early prophecies relate the covenant of Abraham to the promise of future kings and kingdoms. In Genesis 17:6, in

connection with the confirmation of the promise that Abraham would have many nations descending from him, God said, "I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you." The promise given to Abraham was repeated in connection with Sarah, "I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her" (v. 16).

These promises were subsequently passed on to Isaac (Gen. 26:2-5) and to Jacob (28:13-15). Later scope of the promise was narrowed to Judah, the son of Jacob: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his" (49:10). This prophecy not only confines the fulfillment to Judah and his descendants but also anticipates the coming of Christ, to whom the power of king properly belongs. From these references it may be concluded that the concept of a future kingdom is an important aspect of the Abrahamic covenant.

The Promise of the Kingdom Revealed to David

The provisions of God's covenant with David concerning his future kingdom are recorded in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17, with only minor differences in the two passages. The occasion for the covenant was David's desire to build a temple for God. He had constructed an elaborate palace for himself, but the ark was still in the tentlike structure that God had given instructions to construct in the wilderness. When David contacted Nathan, a young prophet, he immediately gave David permission to go ahead, but Nathan had failed to consult God. God had to instruct Nathan to go back to David with a different outline of God's purpose for him. The result was a larger revelation of God's plan for David, which included the provision that David's son, not yet born, would build the temple and that God would do something even greater for David. He would raise up for him a house, not of physical material, but a house in the sense of descendants whom God would bless. The Davidic covenant included a number of important pronouncements.

David is promised a son. As a preface to his divine revelation, God reviewed with David how he had taken him from shepherding sheep to shepherding God's people Israel. God re-

mindful David that he had never told him to build a house or a temple for the Lord. David had been blessed. God had cut off his enemies and now was going to make David's name great (2 Sam. 7:9). God's purpose in David's victories was to provide a safe home for the people of Israel where they would not be oppressed by the wicked (v. 10).

God declared to David, "When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom" (v. 12). This son was Solomon, and God promised that he would establish the kingdom of Solomon.

David's son would build the temple. In addition to establishing Solomon's kingdom, God would empower Solomon to build the temple: "He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam. 7:13). In contrast to Saul, who was deposed because he wandered from the Lord, Solomon was promised that even if he did wrong, God would not take away his love from him as he had from Saul: "I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you" (vv. 14-15).

David himself would have his throne and kingdom established forever. The covenant goes on, however, to state concerning David, "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16).

There is a meticulous accuracy in this prophecy. As has been pointed out in an earlier chapter, Solomon's line was to end physically in Joseph, the husband of Mary, a fact that would give Jesus Christ, his legal son, the legal right to the throne. Mary, however, was to descend from David through another son, Nathan (not to be confused with Nathan the prophet), and therefore would have a different physical lineage. This is taken into consideration in the Davidic covenant. Solomon was promised that his throne would continue forever but not that his house would continue forever, in contrast to David, whose throne and house were promised to continue forever. This covenant, accordingly, introduces the descending line from David to Christ and points to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of this promise to David.

David's understanding of the covenant. After the covenant was declared to David,

King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD? What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Sovereign LORD. For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant." (2 Sam. 7:18-21)

David expressed his understanding of the covenant: "You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you, O LORD, have become their God" (v. 24). It is clear from the verses that follow that David understood that this promise would go on forever (vv. 26, 29). And in verse 24 it is plain that David regarded the people of Israel as well as his own descendants as going on forever (v. 24).

It is important to note that David's understanding of the covenant was that it referred to the people of Israel, not to any other people, and that it referred to his physical descendants. David was overwhelmed that God would reveal such a far-reaching promise: "O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD?" (2 Sam. 7:19). There was no confusion in David's mind between his own throne and his own physical descendants and the throne of God in heaven and the people of God as a whole. The familiar pattern of trying to make this promise refer to the heavenly throne and every believer instead of to the political throne of David and his physical descendants is the result of reading into the passage what it does not say and, in fact, contradicts. The throne of David is an earthly throne relating to the political direction of Israel, not a heavenly throne on which David himself never sat.

The Promises of the Kingdom Confirmed in the Old Testament

The amillennial view of the kingdom. Conservative amillennialists interpret the covenant with David to be a covenant with

the people of God, that is, the church. In doing so, they equate the throne of David with the throne of God in heaven, and they equate the people of Israel who were ruled by David as the people of God in general, not Israel. In studying the confirmation of the covenant in the Old Testament, however, there is no hint anywhere that this was the correct understanding of the covenant. Rather, the Scriptures plainly say that the promise and its fulfillment relate to the line of physical descendants of David consummating in Christ and the people of Israel who are descendants of Jacob. The throne of David is a symbol of authority in a political kingdom, not a universal kingdom, and the subjects of the kingdom are Israelites who are descendants of Jacob. There is no scriptural authorization to interpret this in any other than its literal meaning. Confirmation of the Davidic covenant in the Old Testament confirms the Davidic character of the promise.

The promise of the kingdom is unconditional and is subject to literal fulfillment. One of the most important passages confirming the kingdom promise to David is found in Psalm 89. No other passage makes quite so clear that the kingdom refers to David and the people of Israel and that the covenant is unconditional and certain of fulfillment. God's description of David makes specific that God will fulfill his promise to David forever (vv. 20-29). The psalmist writes,

*You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to David my servant,
'I will establish your line forever
and make your throne firm through all generations.'"
(vv. 3-4)*

This same thought is repeated:

*"I will maintain my love to him forever,
and my covenant with him will never fail.
I will establish his line forever,
his throne as long as the heavens endure."
(vv. 28-29)*

That the promise is unconditional is stated emphatically:

*"If his sons forsake my law
and do not follow my statutes,
if they violate my decrees
and fail to keep my commands,
I will punish their sin with the rod,
their iniquity with flogging;
but I will not take my love from him,
nor will I ever betray my faithfulness.
I will not violate my covenant
or alter what my lips have uttered.
Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—
and I will not lie to David—
that his line will continue forever
and his throne endure before me like the sun;
it will be established forever like the moon,
the faithful witness in the sky." (vv. 30-37)*

In these promises God has made clear that the Davidic covenant is not subject to human conditions and that God has vowed on the basis of his own trustworthiness that he will fulfill the covenant. It is also clear that the promise was given to David, not to someone else, though it will be fulfilled by Christ as the descendant of David, and that the fulfillment relates to the people of God, in this context the people of Israel.

Isaiah frequently refers to the Davidic covenant and its fulfillment. In Isaiah 9:6-7 the specific prophecy is given concerning Christ, his birth, his government, his reign on the throne of David, and the fact that God himself will accomplish this.

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness*